

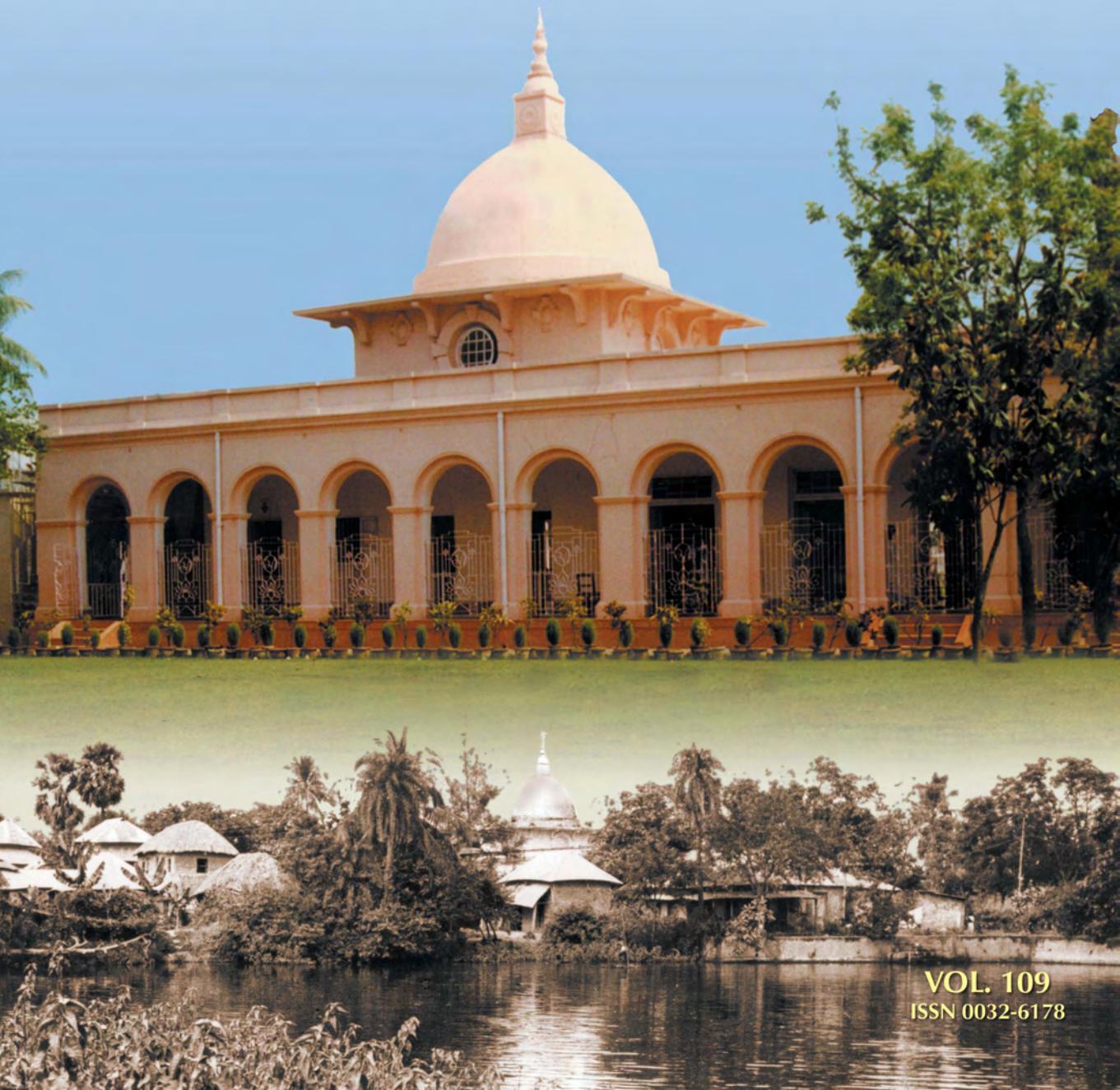
PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

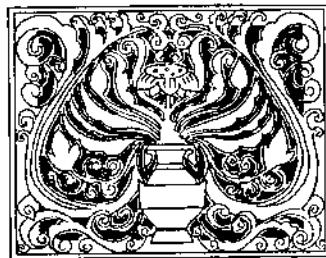


MARCH
2004

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Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

MARCH 2004

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Cover: Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother's temple at Jayrambati seen today and a period photograph in the foreground. The sacred village where Mother was born for the good of all Her children in 1853.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राय
वरान्निवोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 109

MARCH 2004

No. 3

⇒ Traditional Wisdom ⇌

DETACHMENT

ब्रह्मचर्यं समाय गृही भवेत् । गृही भूत्वा वनी भवेत् । वनी भूत्वा प्रव्रजेत् ।
यदि वेतरथा ब्रह्मचर्यादिव प्रव्रजेद्वाहाद्वा वनाद्वा ... यदहरेव विरजेत्तदहरेव प्रव्रजेत् ॥

After the completion of brahmacharya (study in a *gurukula*) one may become a householder (*grīhastha*). After being a householder, one may become a forest dweller (*vānaprasthin*). After being a forest dweller, one may renounce the world (and become a sannyasin). Or else, one may renounce the world from the stage of brahmacharya itself or from *grīhastha* or *vānaprastha* ashramas. ... One may renounce the worldly life the very day one is fired with dispassion. (*Jābāla Upaniṣad*, 4.1)

When butter is produced by churning curds, it should not be kept in the same vessel with the buttermilk, for then it will lose something of its sweetness and hardness. It should be kept in pure water and in a different vessel. Similarly after attaining partial perfection in the world, if one still continues to mix with the worldly and remains in the midst of the temptations of the world, one is likely to become tainted, but one can remain pure by living out of the world. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 139)

If a man throws aside the vanities of the world we hear him called mad, but such men are the salt of the earth. Out of such madness have come the powers that have moved the world of ours, and out of such madness will come the powers of the future that are going to move the world. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 4.171)

The seed of lust is in the mind. That seed is nurtured by the sense organs within and the sense objects without. Thus it grows and produces innumerable fruits. These fruits are to be chopped off and the seeds are to be destroyed. Afterwards, you must sow the seed of the Lord's name and you will reap the harvest accordingly. (Swami Adbhutananda)

❖ This Month ❖

The human body is a precious raft that can take us across the ocean of worldliness. Not understood thus, it usually just ends up as a tool for sense enjoyment and, as a sequel, misery. **'A Simple Superstition'**, this month's editorial, analyses the hold body has over us and underlines the need for detachment from it, cultivation of the mind and pursuit of spiritual values in life.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features this month excerpts from the translation of a Sanskrit paper read by Swami Ramakrishnanandaji before an assembly of pundits in Mysore. Tracing the contributions of Sri Shankara, Sri Ramanuja and Sri Madhava, this eminent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna underlines the uniqueness of the Master and appeals to the learned scholars to bring light to the narrow-minded by expounding to them the truths of their own scriptures.

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita* is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on verses 5 to 12 of the ninth chapter of the *Gita*. The author discusses here the Vedantic view of cyclic creation; how, though God is responsible for creation, He is absolutely detached from the doings of Prakriti, which acts by God's mere proximity; and how fools, who see no self beyond the body, disregard God when He assumes a human form.

Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was invited to Russia by the Ramakrishna Society-Vedanta Centre, Moscow. Using the occasion, the author also visited France, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and the UK. **A Visit to Europe**, the first instalment of the author's travelogue, covers his visit to Russia, France and Italy.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*—An Exposition by Swami Premeshanandaji features the author's comments on sutras 1 to 22 of the third chapter, 'Vibhūti Pāda'. Covering *dhāranā*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*, this instalment is replete with some insightful comments by the author, evidently born of his own experiences. Sri Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee, translator of the original Bengali notes, is a former Professor of Statistics from Calcutta University.

Kundika Upaniṣad is the fifth instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji. Rules for initiation into sannyasa, types of sannyasa and the place of rituals in a sannyasin's life—these are discussed in greater detail in this instalment of the Upanishad. The author is Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Glimpses of Holy Lives features incidents from the inspiring lives of (1) Kanhopatra, a woman saint of Maharashtra, whose honour and dignity was saved by the Lord Himself; and (2) Jyoti Pant, the unlettered brahmin saint whom Lord Ganesha helped, redeeming his promise in the incident featured last month in the same section.

The year 2003-04 is being celebrated all over as the 150th birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. **Holy Mother's Message of Love and Hope** is a detailed report of the multifaceted celebrations organized by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, with a view to spreading awareness about her life and inspiring message among the masses in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. *

‘A Simple Superstition’

EDITORIAL

Yajnavalkya was to address an assembly of sages in Janaka’s palace. Though it was time to begin the discourse, Yajnavalkya waited for Janaka’s arrival. The audience whispered among themselves about Yajnavalkya’s trying to curry favour with the king. Yajnavalkya thought here was an opportunity to demonstrate Janaka’s greatness. The king arrived shortly and the discourse began.

Suddenly, with his yogic power, Yajnavalkya made fire engulf the palace. The sages started running helter-skelter with their staffs and water pots in hand. Janaka was the only one calmly seated. Yajnavalkya asked Janaka, ‘O king, don’t you see your palace burning and the all the sages have taken to their heels?’ Janaka smiled and said, ‘Nothing in this world is mine. The palace may burn but it cannot burn me, the real, immortal Self.’ Yajnavalkya withdrew the fire by his power and the sages returned to their seats, now wiser about the king’s spiritual wisdom. Janaka was called Videsha, meaning ‘one who was devoid of body-consciousness’. Janaka was not called a rajarshi for nothing.

The Reality behind Names and Forms

According to Vedanta the Spirit alone is the ultimate Reality; the differences we see around are due to our distorted vision. Just as during twilight we see a snake in a rope, even so, because of ignorance of our real nature, we see differences in the world, which is in reality nothing but Brahman. The Spirit alone is the abiding reality. The apparent differences are based on names and forms. Everything we perceive is composed of five factors: being (*asti*), the ability to be cognized (*bhāti*), attractiveness (*priya*), form (*rūpa*) and name (*nāma*).¹ The first three pertain to Brahman and the

other two to the world. In other words, minus name and form, the world is nothing but Spirit.²

Other names and forms are real to us because our own name and form are real to us in the first place. Body-based differences are real to us as long as our own body is real to us. The external world appears as it does because of our identification with our bodies. Our perception of the world stands to change if our perception about our own selves undergoes a change.

We are basically the Spirit, but somehow have come to identify ourselves with our body and mind. Through ignorance we have joined ourselves with a particular body, and thus opened ourselves to misery. This idea of body is a simple superstition. It is superstition that makes us happy or unhappy. It is superstition caused by ignorance that makes us feel heat and cold, pain and pleasure. It is our business to rise above this superstition,’ says Swami Vivekananda.³

Body and Pain

Only a man of knowledge is fully above body-consciousness. Till we gain spiritual knowledge ourselves, the body continues to be real to us and this impermanent world an abode of misery (*duḥkhalayam aśāśvatam*).⁴ People, however, do not easily realize the miserable nature of the world. Those who look upon themselves as organic entities keep dancing to the tune of their desires, and believe that everything is fine. Delusion cannot go any further.

Anything that comes into being must perish (*yaj-janyam tad-anityam*). That applies also to the body and the sense enjoyments that result from it.

Pleasure Not the Goal of Life

Making sense pleasure a goal of life can only compound man's misery. Lasting happiness is possible only in the Infinite, not in the finite, says the *Chandogya Upanishad*.⁵ Cursed to premature old age by an incensed sage, King Yayati borrowed his son's youth and enjoyed sense pleasures for many years. At the end of it all he discovered a profound truth: 'Never can desires be quenched by enjoying sense objects. Like fire fed with ghee it only flames up all the more.'⁶

The body may be a vehicle for sense pleasure, but it is more a source of pain when it contracts diseases. Nothing is comparable to the misery of the sense-bound man when his sense desires are intact, but the body is not fit enough to satisfy them. Death is an unthinkable nightmare for such people in that it snatches them forcibly from their body, which they identify with and pamper all through life.

The Sixfold Attribute

Human beings or animals—every body is characterized by six attributes: it (1) comes into being (*jāyate*), (2) has an objective existence (*asti*), (3) grows (*vardhate*), (4) undergoes modifications (*vipariṇamate*), (5) decays (*apakṣiyate*) and (6) dies (*naśyati*).

Sometimes we wonder if holy men could have diseases. All bodies decay and die and those of holy men and incarnations are no exception. Some followers of a holy man who passed away in the middle of the last century believed that his body would not putrefy on death. When he died they neither cremated nor buried the body for a few days, with a view to preserving it. Only when the body started stinking did they inter it and make a memorial for him. Great souls too get diseases, but how they face them holds a lesson for humanity.

Great Souls' Attitude towards Diseases

Sri Ramakrishna, who was worshipped as an incarnation of God in his own lifetime,

had throat cancer during his last days. Some devotees began to wonder if he could have cancer. The devotees of the inner circle, including his monastic disciples, however, tended Sri Ramakrishna, understanding that the 'law was taking its own course' with regard to his body. Sri Ramakrishna remarked that his disease was meant to sift the inner circle of his devotees from those who just came and enquired how he was.

What is of significance is this: even with excruciating pain from throat cancer, Sri Ramakrishna ceaselessly talked of nothing but God, sometimes by signs if could not speak audibly. He believed helping anyone sincerely interested in advancing towards God. This moment he would talk with the doctor about his pain and the next moment his mind would soar in samadhi to superconscious realms of divinity.

Harinath, a disciple of his and later Swami Turiyananda, did not believe that the Master was overcome by the disease. He understood that the Master was living his own teaching, 'Let the body and the affliction take care of themselves; O my mind, you dwell in bliss.' One day at Cossipore Harinath asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, how are you?' The Master replied, 'Oh, I am in great pain. I cannot eat anything, and there is an unbearable pain in my throat.' Harinath knew that a knower of Brahman is beyond the pairs of opposites, pleasure and pain. He understood that the Master was testing him, so he said to him humbly, 'Sir, whatever you may say, I see you as an infinite ocean of bliss.' At this, Sri Ramakrishna said with a smile, 'This rascal has found me out.'⁷

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi had rheumatism as a constant companion for most of her life. But she told a disciple that if only she withdrew her mind a little from the knee the pain just disappeared.

Swami Vivekananda contracted asthma and diabetes during the last part of his life. In his own words, 'I had such a spell of asthma

that I felt like dying. But from within, with every breath arose the deep-toned sound, 'I am He, I am He'. Resting on the pillow, I was waiting for the vital breath to depart, and observing all the time that from within was being heard the sound of 'I am He, I am He!' I could hear all along 'The Brahman, the One without a second, alone exists, nothing manifold exists in the world.'⁸

Sri Ramakrishna remarked that diseases are the tax the soul has to pay for dwelling in the body. Generally, diseases are believed to be the result of one's karma, but with God-centred souls like Sri Ramakrishna they are believed to be the result of their taking upon themselves the sins of others.

Parenthetically we mention here the purifying effect the contemplation of these holy forms can have on us. Our mind cannot but think of the pure and strong mind that animated those external forms, and get purified in the process.

The Ideal before Us

For the sense-bound the body may be just an instrument of sense enjoyment, but for the discriminating it is a vehicle for getting rid of worldliness and realizing our true, divine nature with the help of spiritual disciplines. 'The body is primarily an instrument for the practice of dharma,' goes the well-known saying.⁹ Thus the body deserves to be taken care of even as a vehicle is properly maintained to serve its purpose. The *Katha Upanishad* compares the human body to a chariot in which dwells the individual soul.¹⁰ Proper nutrition and regular exercise help the body remain fit for spiritual practice, whatever be our path: karma yoga (selfless work), jnana yoga (discrimination), raja yoga (mind control) or bhakti yoga (devotion). A spiritual aspirant takes care of his body and undergoes treatment for his ailments so that his body continues to be a fit instrument for spiritual practice and service to others, rather than being a burden to anyone.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji stressed the essentials of religion rather than its non-essentials, or 'secondary details', which are useful only as means to the realization of the divinity inherent in man. A true devotee of Sri Ramakrishna will not pray as much to be rid of diseases as to get strength to suffer them. His ideal will be to keep his mind in bliss even if the body is subject to afflictions and pain.

Sri Ramana Maharshi, the twentieth-century saint of Tiruvannamalai who revived the *vichara marga*, the path of self-enquiry, was afflicted with cancer in his arm. A man of realization that he was, he underwent surgery at the instance of devotees, but without anaesthesia. Swami Turiyananda not only found out the truth about his Master, but also demonstrated by his sterling life that the mind could indeed be detached from the body by practice and training. In his later days he underwent surgery for a carbuncle on his back, without anaesthesia. An important teaching that recurs in Swami Turiyananda's letters is based on the Master's maxim, 'Let the body and the affliction take care of themselves; O my mind, you dwell in bliss.' He encouraged spiritual aspirants to be regular in their practice even if the body was ill.

Need for Mind Training

The connection between the body and the mind is so subtle that they have strong mutual influence on each other. According to Vedanta, we are primarily souls, but have put on a subtle body and a gross body. That we have a subtle body is evident from our dreams: then we are able to perceive through our five senses even when the body and external senses are inactive. The subtle body is composed of our mind, buddhi, prana and subtle sense organs. In deep sleep we are detached from the subtle body also and remain one with ignorance covering the Atman.

The aforementioned superhuman feats of detachment from the body is a result of a strong will power, a strong, purified will that

could detach itself from the body-mind complex and root itself in the Atman, the divine core behind them. Will being the dynamic aspect of buddhi, strengthening it means awakening the buddhi and directing it towards the Atman, which is what spiritual disciplines are about.

We saw that the *Katha Upanishad* compares human body to a chariot. The rest of the allegory will facilitate better comprehension: The soul is the master of the chariot, buddhi (discriminative faculty) is the charioteer, manas (mind, the deliberative faculty) is comparable to the reins, and the sense organs to the horses. The Upanishad stresses the need to rein in the horses so that the master could reach his destination. But this reining in needs to be done by the charioteer, who needs to be wide awake all the time; he cannot afford to be sleepy or sloppy. Unbroken horses and a sleeping charioteer can only spell disaster for the master. Controlled senses and a wide-awake buddhi help one reach the goal of human life, which is God-realization or Self-realization.¹¹

The Glory of the Self

Swami Vivekananda never thought it was too early to teach anyone about the glory of his real Self. He held faith in one's real Self as fundamental to any great accomplishment. 'To preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life' was his ideal in life.¹² Nothing could be a better antidote to the 'simple superstition' of the body idea than struggling to anchor oneself in one's real nature and organizing one's life accordingly.

* * *

Mind training involves a lot of patient struggle and persistence. Giving it a different turn is comparable to reversing the course of a river.¹³ 'But even a little of this practice does not go waste but saves one from great fear,' assures Sri Krishna.¹⁴ And 'if one spends this rare human birth without efforts towards God-realization, such a life amounts to suicide, since one kills one's own self by holding onto things unreal,' cautions Sri Shankara.¹⁵ Swamiji's words come as a great booster in our struggle: 'Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practise the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached.'¹⁶ *

References

1. *Drig Drishya Viveka*, 20.
2. For a detailed discussion on this subject see 'The Three-plus-two Factor', editorial for July 2002.
3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.256.
4. *Bhagavadgita*, 8.15.
5. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.23.1.
6. *Bhagavata*, 9.19.14.
7. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 1997), 364.
8. *CW*, 7.137.
9. *Śarīram-ādyāni khalu dharma-sādhanam*.
10. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.3.
11. *Ibid.*, 1.3.3-8.
12. *CW*, 7.501.
13. Sri Shankaracharya's commentary on the *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
14. *Gita*, 2.40.
15. *Vivekachudamani*, 4.
16. *CW*, 2.87.

Just imagine what a horror it would be if you were living in a room and found the four walls coming towards you and ultimately pressing you from all sides! Even the thought is frightening, and the experience certainly would be terrible. But that is exactly our present condition. The body is the room in which we are living. —*Swami Ashokananda*, *Meditation, Ecstasy and Illumination*, 232.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

March 1904

Vedanta and Its Teachers

In historic times three expounders of higher religious truths were born in India. They all honoured and hallowed the Deccan by incarnating themselves there. The first was Sri Shankaracharya, who is regarded as the incarnation of Sri Shankara himself. He held, 'Brahman is real, the universe is unreal and the individual soul is the same as Brahman.' He who is all-permeating, beyond space, time and causation, all-knowledge, all-bliss and undecaying, is alone real and the other, the universe, which exists in space, time and causation, is unreal. The word *unreal* is understood by Shankara as *relatively real*. Brahman is the true self of the individual soul. Overpowered by the beginningless illusion, the soul identifying himself with the body thinks 'I am physical, old, blind, dwarf'; identifying with the mind he thinks 'I am happy or unhappy', and thus deluded, losing sight of his true nature, and led by his tendencies, the results of his past actions, falls again and again into this well of the world, full of the poison of sense desires and the pains of birth, death, old age and disease. When his good actions bring him into the company of the good, he is able, through their grace, by the means of the fourfold path, to gradually attain freedom. Like darkness before sunrise, his misery, the offspring of ignorance, disappears before his dawning wisdom.

None can attain wisdom without serving the wise and the good. The Lord says in the *Gita*, 'By humble prostrations, questions and loving services, get wisdom: (for then pleased with you,) the seers of truth, the wise, will instruct you in true knowledge.' When he realizes his real nature, he knows himself to be one, omnipresent, knowledge and bliss absolute, beyond birth and death, and does no more come back to this world. This is the conclusion Sri Shankara drew from the scriptures.

In due course when the time was ripe, Vishnu, the father and guide of the universe, according to his words in the *Gita*, 'When religion goes down and irreligion prevails, I create myself, incarnated himself as Sri Ramanujacharya and Sri Madhvacharya. They deprecated the then-existing corrupted monistic views.

Sri Ramanuja held that matter and soul form the body of God and as such are one in him. Hence his system goes by the name of qualified monism. God is infinitely good, the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, all-permeating and has the form of Vishnu. He is the only lord and all—from Brahman to the meanest grass—are His and His alone. The souls are eternal servants of God. Through ignorance, through the desire for earthly enjoyments, they become the slaves of the senses instead of the Lord and thus are subject to repeated births and deaths. When through good actions and divine grace, they begin to serve God, they become free from egoism, realize their own smallness and God's infinite greatness, and become intensely devoted to him, which, concentrating all their energies in him, makes them realize the highest bliss. 'Attaining me, O son of Kunti, there is no rebirth,' says the Lord in the *Gita*.

Sri Madhvacharya also regarded devotion to God as the best means to realize perfection. He held that God, souls and matter, as well as the relation between them, are eternal, but he did not hold with Ramanuja that God could ever be qualified by the other two. If one, controlling the senses and the mind, is able through the grace of God to give up the desire for sensual enjoyments and instead of gratifying one's passions, serves God, one is freed from all misery and realizes the highest ideal of

man. Placed under His holy feet, one has not to come back to the world.

All these great men aim at going beyond birth and death. Although the means they teach differ, the end is the same. 'He who has an intense devotion to God, as well as to his guru—he alone is able to realize the true meaning of the words of the sages.' 'Those who always meditate upon the Self, who are masters of their passions, not affected by pleasure or pain, heat or cold, &c, free from vanity, illusion and the bane of attachment—such undeluded people realize that undecaying bliss.' 'Who conquers the world? He who conquers his mind.' 'The desires are beyond the senses, the mind is beyond the desires, the determinative faculty is beyond the mind, the soul is beyond the determinative faculty, the unmanifested (maya) is beyond the soul and the Purusha or Brahman is beyond the unmanifested; there is nothing beyond the Purusha, he is the end, the highest goal.' The man who has controlled his mind and body alone reaches the highest of these steps—the step 'from whence words come back with the mind, unable to reach it.'

The control of the mind and the senses effected through self-exertion or the grace of God, discrimination or devotion, releases man from misery—this is the view not only of our sages, but that of the Christians and the Mohammedans also. On account of the variety of individual tendencies, the paths are many, though the goal is one. ... The Lord says, 'Whoever worships Me with whatever end in view, I fulfil his wish accordingly; O Partha, it is My path that men tread in all ways.'

As a chameleon assumes different colours, so God shows himself in many forms as well as without form to bless his devotees of different natures. He is with and without form at the same time; is doer and non-doer at the same time. He says, 'Know Me to be non-doer and changeless, though I am the doer thereof.'

The path of bhakti or devotion leads to him very easily. It cannot be said that bhakti is to be found only in India and nowhere else. The Christians and the Mohammedans are also devotees of God. 'Glory be to thee, O Keshava, in the form of Buddha, who, with a heart overflowing with compassion for animals sacrificed, condemns Vedic rites,' sang Jayadeva and thus accepted Buddha as an incarnation of God, following *Srimad Bhagavata* and other Puranas. Here we should not forget the injunction of the Lord, 'It is better to die in one's own religion than take up another's.'

Such being the case, he who regards and tries to prove his own religion to be real and perfect and that of others as unreal and imperfect is to be pitied for his ignorance. Led away by his vanity and presumption, he thinks himself to be the favourite of God and deluded by this nescience exclaims 'Who else is there equal to me?'

In order to enlighten these extremely narrow-minded people, scattered all over the earth, the great teacher, Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, of unparalleled wisdom and devotion, lately appeared in Bengal. This great soul perfectly realized and clearly proved the absolute necessity and the truth of the different religions, intended to meet the requirements of different minds. The embodiment of Sanatana Dharma, he clearly comprehended its universal nature, fitted to all people at all times. The narrow-minded regard this universal religion, based upon the eternal wisdom of the Vedas, as only intended for a class and not humanity.

Learned scholars, well versed in the scriptures, I approach you with all reverence. The children of the old, altruistic and broad-minded Aryan sages, not knowing their own scriptures, have now become exceedingly narrow and mean. I, your humble servant, ask of you a boon: Be kind to them, teach and expound the scriptures to them. Knowledge increases by being given. To hold it back is contemptible. I earnestly hope that my prayer will not be in vain.

*—Abstract of a Sanskrit paper read before an assembly of pundits in Mysore
by Swami Ramakrishnananda*

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

And again the Lord says:

5. Nay, beings do not exist in Me (in reality). Behold My divine yoga. My Spirit, which is the source and support of all beings, does not dwell in them.

Nay, even that was a delusion. The universe is nothing but the supreme Being. It is a divine mystery. We cannot understand it. It seems contradictory that in the preceding verse the Lord said that all creatures dwell in Him, and now He declares that they do not dwell in Him. But the explanation follows.

'It is through My divine yogamaya that it appears to be so. But in reality I am ever unattached to and unconnected with any object. It is all an illusion. The universe is nothing but Me. I create through the universal Mind, and I support My creation by the same power. But I remain always independent because I know My own creation.' It is and at the same time it is not. You see a rope on your path in the twilight and you think it is a snake. The snake is your own creation. It exists for you but not for him who has seen the rope. How strange! We come across a piece of rope and begin to tremble, cry out and run in the dark. We say, 'Well, it was a mistake. I thought it was a snake.' Yes,

but no matter how many persons tell me that it is a rope, I cannot believe it. In my imagination the snake even moved. No. There is only one way to convince me. I must go and see for myself. I must see and touch the rope. Then I will believe and then alone shall I not be frightened again.

So it is with religion. Books and teachers there are plenty. But they cannot convince me. They can at the most arouse the desire in me to investigate. That investigation means the practice of discrimination. Otherwise it is like our belief in spooks. We don't believe in spooks until it grows dark and we are left alone in a deserted building and some funny noises attract our attention. Then the creeping sensation comes and not until we have investigated these noises and that funny white something flapping in the dark corner shall we be at rest.

Now, by way of illustrating with an example what has been taught in the preceding verses, the Lord says:

6. As the air, vast and always moving everywhere, exists in the *ākāśa*, even so, know thou that all beings exist in Me.

Moving everywhere and mighty in expanse, the air or the wind ever exists in the *ākāśa*, or space, without affecting or coming in contact with space, which contains it. So also in Me, who am all-pervading, do all beings exist, without coming in contact with Me or producing any effect on Me. In the Spirit are contained all things which appear as separate realities. They appear too through the divine power of creation. The Fata

Morgana appears in the sky. There it exists. But it does not affect the sky, it being an illusory appearance. The universe is like the blueness of the sky. We see the blue dome overhead. But there is no dome really. We know this, but not so the child. He who realizes this regarding the universe will become free. Words cannot satisfactorily explain this royal mystery. They only show the way and then we have to go there and investigate things for our-

selves.

These questions have occupied the greatest minds at all times. From the remotest past the answers have come, and the conclusions have always been this: listen to the Truth, then think deeply about it, and then meditate on Truth. Through meditation knowledge will come, the light that dispels the darkness of ignorance. And then we will understand and all questioning will cease. This is not the bliss of ignorance, but the bliss of knowledge. It does not mean freedom from doubt through indifference, but freedom because doubts are satisfied. Only then can we live safely in this world. The world can then no more harm us. We have obtained the philosopher's stone that converts all danger into safe places, all pain and sorrow into indifferent experiences. The jnani realizes that he is beyond the universe. How then can anything in the universe affect him?

The bhakta thirsts for God. 'As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.'¹ And after finding God the soul rests in Him. 'In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength and my refuge, is in God,' says David. (62.7) The bhakta is resigned to God, for 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.' (23.1-2) '... and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice.'²

In both cases the world recedes. As the jackal flies before the roar of the lion, so all dangers fly before him who knows the Truth. There is a story that indicates that knowledge is a safeguard against all dangers.

In days of yore there was a demoness who lived on the northern slopes of the Himalayas. Her name was Karkati. She was of fearful appearance and of gigantic stature. She lived in the sky but at any moment she could come to earth and assume form there. She was afflicted with an insatiable appetite and being a demoness she fed only on human beings. Living thus for many years, she began to reflect on her evil ways and she repented. Then

she went to the interior of the Himalayas and there performed religious practices for one thousand years. After that, her mind became purified. While she was thus engaged in spiritual practices with an illumined mind free from attachment and repulsion, Brahmā appeared before her and asked her the object of her wish. Karkati replied, 'O Lord, you favour your devotees who contemplate you and praise you. Your servant wishes for Brahma-jnana.'

Much pleased, Brahmā granted her request, but told her that she should remain a demoness and support herself on the bodies of ignorant persons of cruel nature. When Brahmā left, Karkati sat down for meditation and remained for a long time absorbed in nirvikalpa samadhi. At last she awoke. And again because of her being united with her mind, the thought of her old hunger revived in her. She then began to live on the bodies of ignorant people. But those who had realized the Truth, she could not molest.

While she was thus dwelling in the forest, a king and his minister on a hunting trip and having lost their way in the dark of night happened to come her way. Seeing them, Karkati reckoned on a good repast of them. But before she pounced on them she thought, 'These may be wise men; let me test them.' Then, remaining invisible in the sky, she set up a terrible roar and addressed the king thus: 'O ye, who art like writhing vermin perishing underneath the dark and terrible stone of maya, have ye come here for the purpose of falling a prey to me? Who are you?' To which the king replied, 'O demoness, where are you? Your voice wounds like a buzzing bee.' Then assuming her terrible form and with her mouth wide open, Karkati approached the king. But, quite undaunted, the king told her to abandon her foolish intention of eating him and his minister, threatening to blow her away like a mosquito. Then Karkati understood that the king and his minister were not ordinary persons, for they were devoid of all fear. She addressed

the king thus: 'Those only are qualified to be kings and ministers who have nobleness of disposition, who regard all beings alike and who have knowledge of scriptures. Otherwise they are not worthy of discharging such duties. Therefore, if you are not well versed in wisdom you will serve as my food. I shall now ensnare you in the cage of my questions.' At which the king requested her to state her questions. And then Karkati asked the king about Brahman, and questions like those we are now discussing. The king answered these questions with full understanding and discoursed on Brahman. Well pleased, Karkati offered to serve the king and said, 'All persons are subjects of those who know Brahman. The company of such removes all sorrow.'

The king then asked her to desist from molesting people; and he wanted to know how she would satisfy her hunger if she did not live on human beings. She replied, 'I shall again resort to samadhi, tasting the ambrosia that flows within and then I shall attain *videha-mukti*, being ever free.' Promising not to injure any more beings, Karkati took leave of the king and his minister and returned to the Himalayas.

We see how Karkati was disarmed by the knowledge of the king. So the world loses its danger and poison when the mind becomes illumined. Then death is conquered and life is conquered and eternity is attained. When we are in possession of knowledge no harm can come to us, for we realize that though the body may be subject to many things, the soul remains unaffected. The soul has tasted immortality and is at perfect rest. Until we have found out this royal secret and mystery, we are restless, seeking here and there. As Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The bee buzzes as long as it is not sitting on a flower. It becomes silent when it begins to sip the honey.'³ In another place Sri Ramakrishna said, 'With the divine Knowledge of Advaita (non-duality) in you, do whatever you wish; for then no evil can come out of you.'⁴ If we touch everything with

jnana, the sting will go out of everything and the entire universe will become a place of bliss. And again, 'First rub your hands with oil and then break open the jack-fruit; otherwise they will be smeared with its sticky milk. First secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world.'⁵ So it is with this world. It is very sticky, very nasty and difficult to get through without being harmed. But once we rub our minds with the oil of discrimination, it becomes easy. Then anger, hatred, lust and greed will not stick to the mind.

It is said that when we rub the body with turmeric no alligator will attack us; the scent drives them off. The Bengali poet and bhakta Ramprasad makes use of this fact in a beautiful song of devotion:

Taking the name of Kali,
dive deep down, O mind,
Into the heart's fathomless depths,
Where many a precious gem lies hid.
But never believe the bed
of the ocean bare of gems
If in the first few dives you fail;
With firm resolve and self-control
Dive deep and make your way
to Mother Kali's realm.
Down in the ocean depths
of heavenly Wisdom lie
The wondrous pearls of Peace, O mind;
And you yourself can gather them.
If you but have pure love
and follow the scriptures' rule.
Within those ocean depths, as well,
Six alligators lurk—lust, anger and the rest
Swimming about in search of prey.
Smear yourself with the
turmeric of discrimination;
The very smell of it will
shield you from their jaws.
Upon the ocean bed lie strewn
Unnumbered pearls and precious gems;
Plunge in, says Ramprasad,
and gather up handfuls there!⁶

'As the air, vast and always moving everywhere, exists in the *ākāśa*, even so, know thou that all beings exist in Me,' said Sri Krishna. And he says in the next verses:

7. O son of Kunti, at the end of a cycle all beings return to my Prakriti; and again, at the beginning of (another) cycle, I send them forth.

8. Animating my Prakriti, I project again and again this vast multitude of beings, powerless under the sway of Prakriti.

We have seen that creation takes place in cycles of involution and evolution, the night and day of Brahmā, the creator. The day of Brahmā is called a *kalpa*, the period of manifestation. At the end of a *kalpa* comes a *pralaya*, or period of rest. When dissolution comes all manifestation returns to its germ state. From manifest it becomes unmanifest; from gross it becomes subtle. But there is no annihilation: it is simply a change of condition, of composition, a merging back into its original state. Neither energy nor matter can be annihilated. But it becomes active and latent in turns. From the nebula sun, moon and stars evolve; then they involve and go back to the atomic state. This process is eternal.

Who is responsible for this process? Who regulates these cycles? Who is the creator and how does he create? It is I, says the Lord. I project this vast multitude of beings. How? With the help of My Prakriti, My nature. I have nature under My control. I animate it, invigorate it, and life changes, evolution begins. Nature itself is helpless. All beings are part of nature,

quite powerless, depending on Me. They are all under the sway of My mysterious power called *maya*. With the help of *avidyā*, or Prakriti, which is subject to Me, which in fact constitutes My power, I cause creation and dissolution. All beings are subject to *avidyā*, or delusion, and therefore they have to obey the law. But I am above the law. And all those who take refuge in Me are also beyond the law, beyond nature, beyond *avidyā*, beyond delusion. 'They have conquered death and law, whose minds are firmly fixed on Brahman.'

'I am the great Mother. I give birth to all creatures. I bring forth the entire universe and I again withdraw it all. I exhale and creation comes forth, I inhale and it disappears.' 'As the spider creates and absorbs, as medicinal plants grow from the earth, as hair grows from the living person, so this universe proceeds from the Immortal,' says the Upanishad.⁸

And now another wonderful thing: the Lord says, 'And though I am the Lord of this vast universe still ...

9. These acts do not bind Me, remaining as one unconcerned and unattached to these acts, O Dhananjaya.

The Lord, Ishvara, knows not the feeling of egotism or agency or of attachment for results.⁹ Therefore He is free. There is no dharma or adharma, virtue or vice, for Him as He is beyond the effect of all deeds. How attached we all are to our little, insignificant doings. How dejected and deeply miserable we become if one of our undertakings meets with failure. What heartburn we experience when our work is not appreciated, what despair if the desired end is not forthcoming. Herein lies our bondage. Therefore we are under the law, under nature, in the grasp of *maya*. Our desire

is our weakness, our attachment is our bondage. But, producing the entire Cosmos, the Lord is responsible for whatever is on earth, in heaven, in all the spheres. He is unattached. He sits by and looks on, unmoved. It is the mastery over their own nature, the freedom from desires and attachments that makes gods of men. We make a deed good or evil through our attachment for the result. The moment we can truly detach ourselves and learn not to be moved by results—that very instant we are free. Then we are like God. Actions do not bind us; acting, we do not act. The dry leaf

moves to and fro, now here, now there and still it does not act. Moving, it does not move. It knows neither dejection nor elation no matter where it is blown. So is the sage. But the sage is conscious. The leaf is powerless. It *cannot* respond to emotions. The sage *has* the power to control his emotions. That is renunciation, the test of greatness.

No man is really great unless he is unattached, unmoved by success or failure. Working with all his heart, with all his mind and power, as if his life depended on it, he remains unmoved, unattached and indifferent to the result. Work for work's sake, because it is good to work, but don't work for gain. Gain may and will come, but whether it comes or not, our equanimity should not be disturbed. Then we live a peaceful life, at peace with ourselves and with the world.

'Whoever in the midst of intense activity finds great peace, whoever in the midst of great peace finds intense activity, he is a yogi, he is a great soul, he has achieved perfection.'¹⁰

Man is great to the extent he is free. And man is free so far as he is unattached. To be unattached means to be free from the bondage of desires, not to be moved under any condition, pleasurable or painful. It has often been asked, 'How is that possible? Can we go through this life without being affected by the conditions we meet? Is it possible for man to meet disappointment, sorrow and pain and preserve his equanimity of mind?' And the answer is that though it is not possible for an ordinary man, it becomes possible in proportion to the extent man has realized the Truth. The bhakta takes refuge in the Lord and, resigned to His will, preserves calmness and serenity of mind. The jnani, knowing that life is but a dream, regards the events of life like his dream experiences.

Sri Ramakrishna spoke of a great jnani who lost his only son. He was known to be very fond of the boy and always treated him with great love and kindness. But when the son died, to the great astonishment of his wife

and friends, the jnani showed no signs of sorrow and regret. At last his wife asked him how he could be so hard-hearted as not to shed a tear at the burial of his only child. And then the jnani said, 'Why should I give way to grief? Last night I dreamt that I was married and had six beautiful and loving boys. They were the joy of my heart, my greatest treasures. While we were living happily together an epidemic broke out and carried off my sons, one by one. Then I awoke. And now I have been wondering whether I should lament the death of my six sons or that of my one son. As last night's experience was a dream, so is this life but a dream.' As the waking state destroys the dream and reveals it as a delusion, so in samadhi we wake up from this life-dream and its delusion is destroyed.

This is the strength of the jnani. But that is not possible for the ordinary man, who identifies himself with the mind and the body. Only a sage can feel this strength—a sage who has realized the unreality of everything that is not the Spirit, and who has known himself to be that Spirit. He who knows that he is neither the body nor the mind, has seen himself as separate from these—only *he* is free and beyond sorrow. Freedom and bondage are both in the mind. In the same body man is free and man is bound. The free man and the bound man are both living in the same body. The Real man and the apparent man are both in us. They are one and the same really, the one being only a reflection, as it were, of the other. 'Two beauteous-winged companions, ever mates, perch on the selfsame tree. One of the two devours the luscious fruit, tasting; its mate looks on. Though on the selfsame tree, man sunk in powerlessness is deluded and grieves. But when he sees his mate, adorable, instilled with power, and what His greatness is, his grief departs.'¹¹

The Soul is the bird perched on the highest branch, witnessing the actions of the lower bird, man eating the sweet and bitter fruits of life. The first man does not see the upper bird,

the Soul, calm and majestic, ever undisturbed. But when he tastes a very bitter fruit, he stops for a while and looks up to his mate and he thinks it is better not to taste the fruit of life and he approaches the upper bird, the Soul. But soon he forgets. The fruits look so luscious; it is so good to taste them. Once again he bites into a bitter fruit and again he stops and thinks of his mate. And so he rises higher and higher, coming nearer and nearer the upper bird, until at last he touches that beauteous-winged companion. And lo, a sudden transformation takes place. The lower bird vanishes; it is lost in the higher bird. Oh the bliss, the higher bird alone remains and the lower bird was but its shadow, gone forever. Man unites with God; man is transformed into the Spirit. The lower man is gone and the God-man alone remains. What was bound has become free.

He who realizes this vision abandons the bound man and lives entirely in the free man in the Spirit, in God, just as now we live almost entirely in the bound man, not knowing that beauteous-winged companion, the Real man, the Atman. Ignorance of our true Self is the cause of all our suffering and misery. As soon as we wake up from this state of delusion, fear and sorrow and pain disappear. These may exist in the mind and body, but they were never in the Spirit. When we live in the Spirit, pain and misery of our material self does not concern us so much. And there are free souls, whom these do not concern at all.

When a young brahmacharin came to King Janaka for spiritual instruction the king began to explain the shastras to him. The boy wanted to know how it was possible to live in the world and not be of the world, and he wanted to know whether man could really be unaffected in pleasure and pain. The king tried to explain this to him quoting many texts from the Vedas. The brahmacharin listened attentively but when the instruction was finished he told the king frankly, 'Sir, what you have told me, my father has also told me. I expected to hear something more from you.' The

king said, 'Very well, my boy, come tomorrow and I shall teach you what your father has not taught you.' The boy went home and returned the next morning for instruction, after having bathed and performed his religious practice as becomes a brahmacharin. When he entered the palace (we must remember that in former times many kings were sages and besides ruling their kingdom, they often taught the highest wisdom to their subjects) the boy found the king stretched on an easy lounge, soft pillows supporting his head and silk cloth covering his body. Many attendants were standing by, serving the king in different ways. One was fanning the king, another was gently massaging with perfumed ointments, a third preparing delicious cool drinks. The air was filled with a most delicate fragrance. The boy paid his respect to the king and sat down to be instructed. But the king remained silent. The boy waited but not a word came from the king. Then he became slightly annoyed. He wondered what was the good in waiting there. 'The king is no *jnani*; he cannot teach much. He lives like a worldly man enjoying all there is to be enjoyed. See how he is waited on. And he is enjoying it so much that he forgets to teach me.'

The king knew every thought that passed through the brahmacharin's mind, for he was a *rajarshi*, a kingly sage, a seer of Truth. At last he spoke, 'My boy, you have watched me long enough on this side. Now step around behind the curtain that is concealing the other half of my body.' The boy did as he was told. And what did he see? He shrank back in horror, for there he saw the body of the king pierced by hundreds of needles and an attendant still busy adding these means of torture. And then the boy became perplexed. The sight made him feel faint and miserable. Noticing this, the king said, 'Go, my boy, it is enough for today. Tomorrow I shall instruct you again.'

The lad was very intelligent; he understood the lesson: how it was possible to enjoy the highest and also to suffer the severest

without being disturbed, for had he not seen how the king was unmoved? There was no sign in speech or behaviour or look to indicate the enjoyment on the one side and the suffering on the other.

The boy bowed down before the king, his guru, wept and asked to be pardoned for his evil thoughts. He had learned something his father had *not* taught him.

Such are the sages. They are *men*. We have but just escaped our animal existence. We are the slaves of every emotion that plays on our mind. Now up in the sky elated, the next moment down into the deepest gloom. We are like children, weeping and laughing with tears still in our eyes. Therefore we cannot understand free souls, what to speak of understanding God!

We always make God after our own image. Our conceptions of God are according to our spiritual development. We are moved by a little nonsense and we think God is like us. We think that He is so much pleased, that He becomes happy or angry as we please or dis-

please Him. We pray for half an hour and think that God is very much pleased with us. Again, we forget our prayer time and are filled with fear and horror because God must be angry with us—just children we are. He who with a simple word calls into existence whole solar systems, we think that He is moved by our miserable prayers, that He is happy at our submission, that He has nothing else to do but watch us and punish or reward us as we please or displease Him!

But what does Sri Krishna say? 'These acts of creation and dissolution do not bind Me. I remain unconcerned and unattached.'

But if the Deity is perfect and has no desires, no attachment, how then does creation take place? We know from experience that when we construct something, be it ever so small or insignificant, the act of producing that thing is the outcome of desire. Who creates then? And for whose benefit and how does the creator create? The next verse will make it clear.

10. By reason of My proximity, Prakriti produces all this, the moving and the unmoving. Because of this, O son of Kunti, the world wheels round and round.

It is Prakriti who produces all this creation. But how? By transforming herself into all these animate and inanimate manifestations. But Prakriti is not conscious. How can then she create? Through My presence, as the witness; I bestow on Prakriti My consciousness, by which she begins the process of evolution. Strictly speaking, no one creates; for nature is unconscious and therefore cannot create, and God is consciousness itself and as such incapable of action. Creation is but the fact of the coexistence of nature and consciousness, destruction being another mode of this coexistence. Bring the magnet near the iron, and the iron moves. The presence of the magnet calls forth motion in the iron. Place ice over a fire. The ice melts: it changes its form and substance; from solid it becomes fluid,

from fluid gaseous. The transformation takes place through the presence or proximity of the fire. So it is with God's creation. Wherever we look we find duality. There is light and darkness, attraction and repulsion, positive and negative, cause and effect. We find man and woman, soul and body. And the highest manifestation, God and nature. Nature is God's manifest energy, His shakti, His maya. In Sanskrit the terms are Purusha and Prakriti. In reality these two are one. Purusha and Prakriti are the two coexisting aspects of the one Existence. Man and woman together form humanity. Prakriti and Purusha together form God. The one is God as much as the other. The one Existence, which we call God or Brahman, is known as Purusha and Prakriti, or soul and energy or nature. These are its highest expres-

sion, its highest manifestation. When there is manifestation there is duality. And from this highest state of duality, soul and nature and all other duality have proceeded. As the dynamo charged with energy becomes active, so nature charged with consciousness produces out of herself all manifestation. As the sun shining on the water charges the water with its own heat, so the Purusha shining on the power latent in Prakriti, things begin to manifest. And this is the eternal process called creation.

We see how step by step Sri Krishna defines His position, His relationship to creation. We do this through the method called *arundhati nyāya*. What is meant by that?

In India when a bride comes to her husband's house for the first time, he shows her a very tiny star called Arundhati. To show her that tiny star he has to direct her gaze in the right way, which he does by asking her to look at something near and something big in the direction of the star, say a branch of a tree. Next he draws her attention to a large, bright star observed beyond this branch and so on, till by several steps he succeeds in leading her eyes to the right star. This method of leading to a subtle object through easy steps is called *arundhati nyāya*.

The Lord begins by stating in verse seven that He projects all beings at the beginning of evolution: Prakriti is only an instrument in His hands. Next, He says in verse nine that He is not affected by that act since He sits by as one unconcerned, perfectly unattached. And, finally, in verse ten He leads up to the final Truth that really He does nothing. It is Prakriti who, animated by His proximity, produces all that is. It is His Light that lights up Prakriti and makes her live and act. That is all the relation that exists between Him and Prakriti.

We must remember that creation will always remain a mystery. Why this creation?

No one can tell. We cannot say that it is for the Lord's own enjoyment, for He does not enjoy anything outside of Himself. He is perfect and pure Consciousness. Neither can there be another enjoyed, for the enjoyer must be conscious, and whatever is conscious is the Lord, the One without a second. Nor can we say it is to secure moksha, because in its very nature creation is opposed to moksha, it meaning bondage.

Furthermore, the question itself is illogical. Creation is maya, delusion. As long as we are under the influence of maya, how can we expect to explain the illusion? The dreamer cannot explain the dream. He must first wake up. And when we wake up, the question loses all its importance. Then the universe will be seen as a mirage. It loses its significance; it is of no more account than a little mud puddle. He who knows the Truth becomes blissfulness itself. He finds all enjoyment in himself and not outside. The world holds no charm for him. Therefore, Vedanta says, do not stop to find out why and how you got this disease of ignorance; cure the disease, get rid of it and be happy. Answers to the questions who, how and why certainly lie beyond the universe, beyond maya. But being under maya's sway, how then can we explain it? Can a hypnotized person explain how and why he is hypnotized? Certainly not, as long as he is under the hypnotic influence. Hence, instead of questioning we must try to throw off the hypnotic influence. This we can do in two ways: either by taking refuge in the Lord who is the great magician, or through self-analysis, meditation and discrimination.

These things are difficult to understand. Even the wise cannot understand them. Even they cannot grasp these divine mysteries, what to speak of fools! What the fools do, the Lord explains in the next verse.

11. Not knowing My supreme nature as the great Lord of beings, fools disregard Me, dwelling in human form.

Deluded, men do not know that I, appearing among them in human form, am the supreme Spirit, the very Self of all beings, able to produce a human form through which I manifest, free from egotism and attachment. The incarnations of God are recognized by few. St John said of Jesus, 'He was in the world and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not.'¹²

The world sees only a human being in these Sons of God. 'And the Light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not.'¹³ Nay, some even despise and persecute the Lord. The condition of such persons is very pitiable. Their life is in vain, as stated in the next verse. Those fools who disregard the Lord ...

12. They are of vain hopes, of vain deeds, of vain knowledge and senseless, possessed with the deluding nature of *rākṣasas* and *asuras* (creatures of passion and darkness).

The fools neglect their own Self, their higher nature. They see no Self beyond the body. They have only the body-idea and they do not believe in God. All their hopes and deeds and knowledge are in vain. It does not bring them any nearer to the goal of man. They will be born again and again, passionate, godless and ignorant. What profit is it to man to be learned or wealthy or powerful, to be respected by another, if he knows not himself, if he is ignorant of the divine spark within, if he does not believe in his own immortality? This is sad indeed. How much sadder is the case of the wicked who live in crime and darkness, who get scorched in the fire of sensuality and ambition, who struggle through life committing sin after sin, to pass out at the end on the path of darkness from which they will return again to go through the same process endlessly.

How different it is with those bhaktas who are engaged in devotion to the Lord, who walk the path of righteousness, who have faith in the mystery of man's divine nature and the essential identity of the Deity with the being within man. They find rest in God; they never

come to an evil end. They are, as St Paul says, 'strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man'.¹⁴ Christ dwells in their hearts by faith; they are grounded and rooted in love, and are filled with the fullness of God. Sri Krishna speaks of such in the next verse.

(To be continued)

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As far as we can, we must give up. Darkness and light, enjoyment of the world and enjoyment of God will never go together. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' Let people try it if they will, and I have seen millions in every country who have tried; but after all, it comes to nothing. If one word remains true in the saying, it is, give up everything for the sake of the Lord. This is a hard and long task, but you can begin it here and now. Bit by bit we must go towards it.

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 4.180

A Visit to Europe

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

In my previous trips abroad, I had visited countries in all the continents except Europe. So I was thinking that if an opportunity arose, I would visit our centres in Europe. This opportunity presented itself when Swami Jyotirupananda, head of our Moscow centre, earnestly requested me to go over to Russia for at least eight or nine days. I used the occasion to also visit France, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and the UK. This tour of seven countries was completed in five weeks—quite hectic!

Russia

On the midnight of 6 June 2003 I took off for Paris by an Air France flight from New Delhi. It landed in Paris at 6:00 am French time. This airport is so huge that going on foot from one end to the other is indeed a daunting task. But, of course, airport buses take you to various terminals. After waiting for 3½ hours in the transit lounge, I took the flight to Moscow at 9:25 am. The flight landed at Moscow at 3:15 pm (local time). The Passport Control (Immigration) hall, where the arriving passengers have to report, was overcrowded. There was not even enough standing space! The hall was not big enough and not even well lighted. There were not enough counters to handle the big crowd; and then the persons managing the counters took their own time for each passenger. As a result, I had to wait for ninety minutes to get through passport control! And then I couldn't find my luggage! After searching here and there in vain, when I was about to lodge a complaint, I found my two pieces of luggage in one corner of the hall. What a great relief!

Swami Jyotirupananda, Liliana, the Secretary of the Vedanta Society, Brahmachari

Victor (Amritachaitanya) and Alex were patiently waiting outside. It took an hour to reach our centre. Of this later. Now a few words about Russia.

Russia is the largest country in the world in area. It was under communist rule from 1917 to 1991. Since December 1991, when the communist regime ended, it is considered an independent country. The day of independence is celebrated in June and it is a public holiday. But, except with the Government, you don't find any enthusiasm about it among the general public. Now the USSR has shrunk into the present Russian Federation consisting of twenty-one republics.

Russia was the second superpower till 1991, but only militarily. Economically things were quite bad and that is why the USSR (Soviet Union) disintegrated. Under communism religion was taboo, but under the new regime it is allowed. In June 1997 the Russian Parliament accorded state recognition to four religions: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. Hinduism is not a state-recognized religion and therefore cannot be preached. The Orthodox Church is regaining its power, and the Government is fully supporting it. But Roman Catholicism or Protestantism has no place in Russia today! So Russia is fast undergoing vast changes, though even now there are politicians who would like to bring back communism in some way or other. But that seems to be a vain hope.

Moscow-Kremlin

The Kremlin, Russia's seat of power, is in Moscow. In the twelfth century, this spot, surrounded by two rivers—Moscow and Neguriaya—was considered highly suitable to be the capital of the country, as it could be pro-



Red Square with the Kremlin in the background

tected from alien invaders. To cover the area not covered by the rivers, a wooden wall was erected. When this was destroyed by enemies, after some centuries a brick wall was erected. For over five centuries, the Kremlin has been protected by the red brick walls and twenty mighty towers. The total length of the Kremlin walls is almost 2.5 km. From time to time churches and cathedrals were built inside the Kremlin area. The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church lives in one of them. The administrative buildings are also inside the Kremlin, but only the churches are open to tourists. One of the churches contains huge bells. The czars got huge bells manufactured from time to time. One such was broken. This broken bell and a huge cannon are supreme examples of Russian casting.

Swami Jyotirupananda had fixed up a programme for visiting some of the important places of interest. A lecture had also been arranged at the Indian Embassy on 12 June, since my trip to Russia was at the invitation of the Indian Embassy.

On the 8th morning we four—Liliana, Brahmachari Victor, Dmitry, a young man from Belarus, and I—went to Sergiev Posad, the largest monastery in Russia. It is a two-hour drive from Moscow. This monastery was

founded in 1337 AD by Saint Sergiev of Radoneth of the Orthodox Christianity. Sergiev had close connection with the rulers of Russia. The great Russian czar, Ivan the Terrible, was christened in this monastery. Thus, with the patronage of the rulers, this monastery grew in size and wealth. Today, St Sergiev is a real functioning monastery for men.

Many devotees visit the churches at the monastery. Prayers are held and a priest leads the choir. All people sing in chorus. That creates a holy atmosphere.

From Sergiev Posad we left for a dacha in the countryside. During the communist rule,



The broken Czar Bell



Sergiev Posad

in order to increase agricultural production, the Government granted lands in suburban areas, admeasuring 800 sq m, to people working in Moscow. The people were asked to grow vegetables in the land for their own use and build their own houses. Three lady devotees are living in one such dacha, a few kilometres away from Sergiev Posad. Once you leave the main road and enter the village areas, there are no asphalted roads. Due to rains, these narrow roads are slushy. After a little search, we found out the house of these lady devotees: Lena Khalasena, Nisa Petrobna and Olga; they were waiting for us. They had cooked a vegetarian lunch for me: rice, vegetable fry and so on. They seemed very happy that we visited their house. One of them could speak English.

For the evening, Jyotirupananda had fixed a visit to the world-famous Bolshoi Theatre, to witness the ballets being staged there. Some popular stories are enacted through choreographed dances by men and

women. The design of sets and the music were elaborate.

I felt that these dances are more of gymnastics and they are rather acrobatic, in contrast with Indian dances, where expression of *bhava* through *mudras* is more prominent.

We returned to our ashrama by 10 pm. Even then the sun had not set. It was like 5:30 pm in Kolkata!

Next morning I was taken to Pushkin Art Museum. Pushkin is considered the greatest writer of Russia. He was also an ardent art collector. The Museum has a good collection of sculptures also, copies of Greek and Roman in plaster of Paris. It also contains original paintings of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia and Europe. While returning, the car which Dmitry of Minsk (Belarus) drove met with a minor accident. So he had to leave for his home and get the car repaired.

Swami Jyotirupananda had fixed up a programme for a cruise on the River Volga, which is the biggest river in Europe. Invited by Natasa, a devotee, we were to go to Yaroslavl, a town on the Volga, 3½ hours away. This lady devotee had arranged a boat trip on the Volga and invited her friends to join in. But the programme had to be cancelled for more than one reason. Dmitry's car was to take us to Yaroslavl. But it was damaged. Moreover, my passport and visa were deposited for registration at the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Government. It had got stuck up there, and from 12 June the offices were closed for holidays. If the passport could not be taken back, then my programme to leave for Paris on the 16th would have got into trouble. So Jyotirupananda and Liliana went about the task in right earnest and got the passport out. They had to work hard for it a whole day.

Incidentally, I may say here that the rules of the Russian Government in regard to foreigners are very rigid and troublesome.

On the 12th morning Jyotirupananda accompanied me to a park on the Moscow River. We also saw some of the ancient cathedrals of



With Indian ambassador Mr K Raghunath

the thirteenth century, being renovated now by the Government.

At 11:15 am (Prof) Dr Mark Mukulsky and Dr Rybakov came to meet me. They are devotees and well acquainted with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature.

In the afternoon we left for the Indian Embassy, where I was to speak on 'The Message of Vedanta for Modern Man'. The day being a holiday, there was no traffic jam! Around 4:30 pm we met the Indian ambassador to Russia, Mr K Raghunath. He is from Tamil Nadu. After tea, we moved on to the auditorium. There were about 100 people, mostly Russians. Liliana translated the speech sentence by sentence. I found that people evinced great interest in the subject. I answered a few questions also.

Returning to our centre, we had to finish our dinner quickly and proceed to Moscow rail station to take the train to

St Petersburg at 11 pm. During the communist rule this city was named Leningrad, but it regained its old name, St Petersburg, after the communist rule came to an end.

The train service is quite efficient. The compartments are like our AC 2-tier ones in India. When we got out at St Petersburg station, a cold blast and rain welcomed us! The members of the Ramakrishna Society of St Petersburg met

us at the station—Mr Micguel, the Secretary, Mr Igor and Ms Luidmila.

Only recently, St Petersburg celebrated its 300th anniversary. The heads of forty-nine states had been invited. Mr Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India, also attended these celebrations. We reached St Petersburg only a few days after the celebrations. So the city was bristling with tourists.

Micguel and Igor took me for a round of this historic city full of museums and wonder-



With the devotees in the Moscow ashrama shrine

ful architecture. We went to Palace Square, which is of gigantic proportions, all paved. The Armitage Palace, huge and magnificent, which was once the residence of the czars, now contains a huge museum. There was a long queue for tickets, and it was raining and cold. I told my companions that I could not wait in the queue in that bad weather. So the visit to the museum was dropped. Palace Square is surrounded by beautiful, gigantic buildings.

St Petersburg stands on the Nova River, which is not far away. It is like a canal and falls into the Baltic Sea. There are motor launches to take tourists around on the river and in the canals.

Returning to the Society, we had prayer and meditation. Fifteen or sixteen devotees were present. Till 9 pm I answered some of their questions. St Petersburg being so much in the north, this season here is called 'White Night'. You can read newspapers without any light, as there is sunlight throughout the night! You can see the sun even at 11 pm. As a contrast, in winter you can't see the sun for weeks together!

Next morning, Swami Jyotirupananda took me to Peterhof, which means Peter Town. It takes nearly an hour or more to reach this place on the sea. This is like a huge park, which is filled with palaces of the czars, who lived in opulence. The poor people were neglected. All this brought in communism, but alas, that god too failed! There are wonderful fountains here. This place is on the Baltic Gulf and therefore it was quite cold. Occasional showers made it colder!

In the afternoon at 5 pm we went to the Children's Art School premises, where a public lecture had been arranged. I spoke on 'Sri Ramakrishna's Spiritual Ideals for Modern Man'. One devotee translated it sentence by sentence, it seemed, quite creditably. It took some fifty minutes, followed by a question-answer session for forty-five minutes. There were about fifty persons in the audience, in-

cluding some academicians. It being a holiday, there were less people.

On the 15th, which was a Sunday, we left at 9:30 am for Izwara, which is nearly 150 km away. This was the estate of Nicholas Roerich, who is well known for his paintings of the Himalayas. He was a great admirer of India and spent many years at Kulu, in Himachal Pradesh. Their house and the estate are now managed by a trust. Ms Olga, a very devoted lady, is in charge. Some schoolgirls staged for us a cultural programme of dances and songs. I saw the exhibition and museum also. After lunch, Jyotirupananda conversed informally with the guests in Russian. After some rest, we left for St Petersburg. We were caught in a traffic jam at 7:15 pm. Returning to the centre, I found some devotees there, and answered some of their questions.

We had to leave for Moscow by the night train reaching there on 16th morning by 6:40 am. Liliana was at the ashrama preparing breakfast and lunch. We had to start for the airport at 12:45 pm, as I was to leave for Paris that evening. Swami Jyotirupananda, Brahmacari Victor, Liliana and Alex saw me off at the airport. I bade goodbye to Russia and took the flight to Paris. It took four hours of flying time to reach there.

Paris to Italy

I reached Paris at 6:20 pm. Swamis Veetamohananda (head of our France centre) and Swami Devatmananda met me at the airport and took me to the ashrama at Gretz, a small beautiful town thirty to forty kilometres from Paris.

The ashrama is situated on twenty-five acres of land. It is a quiet place with greenery all around. Our ashrama here is called Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna in French. Started in Paris in 1937, it was later shifted to Gretz. In France English is not of much help. You must learn French. All the activities here are carried on in French.

Besides Veetamohananda, Devatmanan-



Entrance to the Gretz ashrama

da and Gangananda, there are two young men at the ashrama, one American and one Nigerian, whom they call Ramji. There are also two ladies and three old gentlemen. The main building is an old mansion. The present shrine is an extension on the right side. Besides these buildings, there is a Mother's House. At a little distance there are two guest houses near one of the gates.

At 6:30 am a prayer is held in the shrine, followed by meditation and some chanting. After breakfast at 8 am, Swami Veetamohananda took us (Dr Gour Das from Kolkata and I) round the ashrama. There are a few cows and a flower garden. Maintenance of such a big property is a real job!

After we had lunch at 12 noon and a little rest thereafter, one Mr Bikash Sannyal came and took us for a tour of Paris. He is an ex-student of our former Pathuriaghata Students' Home in Kol-

kata and the first principal of our college at Narendrapur. There was a heavy downpour. Nevertheless, Mr Sannyal took us round some of the important landmarks of Paris. The UNESCO building is not that attractive. We saw the Eiffel Tower, but didn't go up. We also saw the places where Swami Vivekananda stayed during his visit to France in 1897. These buildings are now occupied by business establishments and so all that we could do

was see the buildings from outside. Thousands of tourists visit Paris all through the year. It is one of the most beautiful cities of the world. Finally, Mr Sannyal took us to India House in the university campus. Many countries have their houses here, occupied by students from those countries. Mr Sannyal is a retired man, but even now he works for the UNESCO. He is quite a busy man! Our return journey to Gretz took an hour and forty-five



In front of the palace with Mr Bhogilal (r) and Dr Gour Das



St Francis of Assisi

minutes due to traffic jams! This is the common malady which all big cities all over the world suffer from in modern times.

Next morning, 18th June, we were joined by Mr Bhogilal Patel and Dr Suneeti Basu, who had arrived from England. We went to Melon, another small town, where the finance minister of Louis XIV built a big palace for himself with government funds; and then he invited the king to have a look. But, alas, the king got furious that government funds had been spent in this manner. So the finance minister was sent to jail!

After lunch, we three—Dr Suneeti Basu, Dr Gour Das and I—left for the airport at 1:30 pm, to take the flight to Rome. Around 4:30 pm we hired an Opel at Rome airport. Dr Suneeti drove us to Assisi, 220 km away, in north Italy, the birthplace of St Francis of Assisi. After reach-

ing Perugia, we could not locate the correct route to Assisi; it was night and the signposts were somewhat confusing. However, we were in contact with Mr Vito Degrandi, our host at Assisi, over the mobile phone. Vito is a bachelor. He visits India every year. He has a *kutia* in Uttarkashi, where he spends a month or so in winter. At last we could meet Mr Vito at the Assisi railway station. He took us to Sujata's place. She is a devotee from Holland (her given name is Sylvia Lehman). We had our dinner there at 11:30 pm and then drove to Vito's place over the hill. It was pitch dark and we were wondering where we were heading.

But the morning took us by surprise. Built on a hill, Vito's little house has wonderful scenery all round—mountains and valleys, ripening crops and olive groves. It was simply charming.

At 9 am we left for seeing the places associated with St Francis and St Clare. Vito took us to these places and explained their importance to us: St Maria Angelino Cathedral and basilicas with the tombs of St Francis and St Clare. Then we went to Sujata's place for lunch and thence returned to Vito's house for rest.

St Francis was born of a rich and cultured family in Assisi in 1182 AD. When he was twenty-six years old, he had a mysterious



At Vito's house



St Francis Basilica, Assisi

dream at Spoleto, asking him to return home. Back at Assisi at San Damiano Church he heard a voice from the crucifix, 'Go Francis and repair my fallen house.' So he renounced the world and lived a life of intense austerity and devoted himself to the restoration of spiritual Christianity. He also restored many churches. Thus he took the words he heard as both literal and figurative.

Many others followed his path. Among the young ladies who became his followers, St Clare was endowed with spiritual greatness. The Franciscan Order was approved by the Vatican. With chastity, poverty and charity as the cardinal principles, the monastic order started by him grew very fast. He travelled to Jerusalem and Egypt. In 1224, at Mount La Verna, he received the stigmata—which means development of wounds in hands and feet as was suffered on the crucifix by Christ the Saviour. He

passed away in 1226, at the young age of forty-two, at Assisi, also called Santa Maria degli Angeli. Today, Assisi is a place of pilgrimage, particularly for Roman Catholics. The basilicas and other churches and places associated with St Francis draw people from various parts of the Western world.

On the 19th afternoon, we went to meet Father Anthony Elenjmittam, originally from Kerala, now well settled in Assisi. Very broad-minded, he is a linguist and has studied the Upanishads and other scriptures. He has translated many books from Indian languages into Italian, and has many books to his credit. When in India, he had close connection with the Ramakrishna Mission centres. I knew him in the fifties, when he used to visit our Bombay ashrama. From his place, we went to St Clare's basilica, where her earthly remains were entombed.



In front of St Clare's Basilica, Assisi



St Peter's Basilica and St Peter's Square

In the evening, back at Vito's place, we enjoyed the beautiful scenery around. A nice old couple, Luciano and Luciana Porpora, neighbours of Vito, joined us. They are disciples of Swami Chidananda Saraswati of Rishikesh. One young Englishman named Henri Jarvis and his fiancée Katya also joined the party, besides Sujata. It was a lively gathering. They cooked a nice meal; we had a fine dinner. Henri teaches English. Katya is an Italian. They are both interested in India.

Next day, I decided to take complete rest, having caught a bad cold and being in no mood to

wander about. In the evening, Henri and Katya sang some Italian bhajans. Vito made a big Italian pizza.

Next day, early morning, Dr Suneeti Basu, Dr Gour Das and I left for Foligno station to take the train to Roma Termini (main station of Rome). Vito dropped us at the station. We reached Roma Termini at 9 am and took a tourist bus that goes round the whole of Rome from morning till evening. If you buy a full ticket, you can get down and get in at the particular bus stops. These buses run every half an hour.

We got down at Spanish Baths at 9:50 am, but walking in the hot sun was rather difficult. So we gave it up and took the bus again. At St Peter's, in the Vatican, we got down.

St Peter's Basilica is huge; it is at the centre of Vatican City. The magnificent Piazza San Pietro—St Peter's square—leads us to St Peter's.

The scene is dominated by its dome. On the walls inside there are wonderful paintings depicting various episodes in the history of Rome and Christianity. The dome of St Peter's was designed by Michelangelo. We spent some two hours looking at these architectural marvels, which belong to the period of Renaissance in the Middle Ages.



The Colosseum



On the bridge of the Tiber

The Vatican is the citadel of Roman Catholic Christianity. His Holiness the Pope presides over it. From St Peter's, we took the bus to the Colosseum, which belongs to the pre-Christian era of Rome. It is a grand arena where 20,000 people could sit in the galleries, to witness slaves fighting the hungry lions or the gladiatorial battles. It was indeed a great transition from the pagan Roman Empire to the Christian Kingdom. When a Roman emperor got converted to Christianity, the pagans and their temples were destroyed mercilessly.

Rome is dotted with innumerable historic monuments. If you have to see all of them, it would take a few days. The modern city is built around the historical ruins, keeping them as intact as possible.

The present-day Europe has inherited the culture of Greece and Rome—philosophy and art from Greece and statecraft, empire building and so on from Rome. Today's Western world, which is influencing the whole world, got its intellect and art from these two great civilizations, which have disappeared today.

We returned to Roma Termini by the tourist bus by 3:15 pm. But there was no train to Foligno before 7:37 pm. So we had to wait to

board this train. We were received at the Foligno station and taken to his house by our host Vito.

Next morning, we started for Rome in the car hired by Suneeti Basu. From Rome we were to take the flight to Paris. First we went to St Angelica Basilica, where Sujata met us to bid goodbye. Vito escorted us to the highway.

At the airport, the car was given back. The flight was on time. But after landing in Paris, we had to wait for the arrival of the staircase for 20 minutes! Then again,

we found that our luggage had not arrived. In fact, the luggage of about half of the passengers did not arrive. We waited for two hours, but in vain. So we lodged a complaint and left for the Gretz ashrama. Swami Devatmananda was at the airport to meet us. In international travels, one has to face this problem of missing luggage now and then!

At the Gretz ashrama, I met the devotees after dinner for more than an hour and answered questions with the help of an interpreter.

One of the questions was 'Why do we consider Sri Ramakrishna an avatara?' Since the answer would itself form an article, I refrain from putting it down on paper.

Next morning also the luggage did not arrive. But we were told that they had been located and would be delivered at our residence the next day. But we had to leave for Holland by car at 12 noon. We were now four—Dr Suneeti Basu, Dr Gour Das, Sri Bhogilal Patel and I. Bhogilalji, a resident of UK, finds pleasure in driving his Honda all through Europe. His bedding is stuffed behind in the boot. He carries food cooked by himself, in which art he excels.

(To be continued)

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras—An Exposition

SWAMI PREMESHANANDA

(Translated by Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee)

Chapter 3: The Section on Powers (*Vibhūti-pāda*)

All external acts are performed by the gross body; the main functions here are those of the organs and the vital force. The internal acts are performed by the subtle body. When we think something, we see that the mind is active. Behind our mind (manas) stands our intellect (buddhi) together with our past impressions, and behind the intellect is our ego. Unless these four entities combine, no thoughts can be generated. All thoughts serve the need of our ego (they are meant for the experience of our 'I'). Buddhi regulates all our thoughts. Buddhi is assisted by past impressions, memory or *chitta*.¹ Manas performs the act of thinking with the help of the other three entities mentioned above. That is why we use the term *mind* in places where the term *chitta* is used in Yoga shastra. The saint Patanjali calls

the set of four entities by the term *chitta*. Swamiji has called it 'mind-stuff', meaning those 'assistants' with the help of which the mind performs its functions.

A spiritual aspirant who becomes absorbed in the meditation of God through spiritual practice acquires powers [*vibhūtis*]. Thereby nature becomes subjugated and it becomes possible to master powers like *anīmā* [by which one can become as small as an atom]. The principal means of subjugating nature is yoga. The topic of yoga was discussed in the first chapter ('Samādhi-pāda'). The second chapter ('Sādhana-pāda') dwelt on the spiritual practices constituting yoga. In the present chapter, ('Vibhūti-pāda'), we shall discuss the powers accruing from the practice of yoga.

1. *Deśa-bandhaś-cittasya dhāraṇā.*

Dhāraṇā is holding the mind on to some particular object.

Comment: To hold the mind steady on one particular object after withdrawing it from all other objects through *pratyāhāra* is called *dhāraṇā*. The spiritual practices we spoke of earlier are preparations for those that begin with *dhāraṇā*. Yoga starts with *dhāraṇā*. For instance, suppose we want to fix the mind

on the image of Sri Ramakrishna. Keeping the body and the mind strong and steady, if we continue looking at his picture, a photograph-like image forms in our memory. When through long practice that impression becomes distinct, we feel as if we are looking at his image. This is *dhāraṇā*.

2. *Tatra pratyayaikatānatā dhyānam.*

An unbroken flow of knowledge in [that is, thought towards] that object is dhyana.

Comment: Holding on to this *dhāraṇā*, when we are able to steadily think for a long

time 'I am seeing the image of the Master', it is called dhyana.

3. *Tadevārtha-mātra-nirbhāsanī svarūpa-śūnyam-iva samādhiḥ.*

When that, giving up all forms [that is, external parts], reflects only the meaning, it is sam-

adhi.

Comment: At last when we are able to see the image of the Master so distinctly that all our thoughts seem to have ceased and we no longer feel that we are meditating, we reach a

state where it seems as if the Master is sitting before us and we are truly seeing him. That state is called samadhi.

4. *Trayam-ekatra samiyamah.*

(These) three [*dhāraṇā*, dhyana and samadhi] (when practised) in regard to one object is *samiyama*.

Comment: *Dhāraṇā* and dhyana are the first two stages of samadhi. When the mind rises to the level of samadhi, we gain total mastery over our subtle body. *Sam* means 'to-

tally' and *yam* means 'to control'. These three practices are together called *samiyama*, because through these one can bring the mind and buddhi (intellect) totally under one's control.

5. *Tajjayāt prajñā'lokah.*

By the conquest of that [*samiyama*] comes the light of knowledge.

Comment: When the mind becomes totally immersed in samadhi, there remains no impediments to knowledge—one can know whatever one wishes to know. Rishis knew spiritual truths only with a mind steeped in samadhi. Even some of the modern scientists

have discovered many truths about the external world with their minds in this state. Through a mind soaked in samadhi one can know everything within the creation. This will become clear from the aphorisms that follow.

6. *Tasya bhūmiṣu viniyogah.*

That [*samiyama*] should be employed in stages.

Comment: From lower stages the mind can rise to a higher stage in course of attaining knowledge. But if instead of trying to raise the mind gradually, we attempt to apply it to

some subtle object all on a sudden, it becomes impossible for us to acquire knowledge about it.

7. *Trayam-antaraṅgam pūrvebhyaḥ.*

These three are more internal than those that precede [them].

8. *Tadapi bahiraṅgam nirbijasya.*

But even they are external to the seedless (samadhi) [in which this universe no longer exists as we see it].

Comment: Of the eight components of *Yoga*, the first five are mere preparations. *Dhāraṇā*, dhyana and samadhi constitute the real practice of the art of restraining the modifications of the mind-stuff. For this reason they are called 'the internal practices' for the attainment of samadhi. As the mind is raised higher and higher through this samadhi, the purified mind transcends the realm of *Prakṛiti* (nature) and attains the experience of unqualified *Brahman* (that is, the yogi attains *nirbijā* samadhi). Then he realizes, 'At no time did I have

any relation with the mind and buddhi. I used to regard myself as the mind-buddhi complex through mistake. Rising to the level of samadhi with the help of this mind and buddhi, I have been able to reach my true Self. I do not have anything more to do now. *Dhāraṇā*, dhyana and samadhi are really functions of the subtle body and those have no connection with my true Self. From my present perspective, therefore, those are external entities, which are quite foreign to me.'

9. *Vyutthāna nirodha-saṁskārayor-abhibhava-prādurbhāvau nirodha-kṣaṇa-cittānvayo nirodha-pariṇāmaḥ.*

By the suppression of the disturbed impressions of the mind and by the rise of impressions of control, the mind, which persists in that moment of control, is said to attain the controlling modifications.

10. *Tasya prásānta-vāhitā saṁskārāt.*

Its flow becomes steady by habit.

Comment: After one roams in the external world for hundreds of thousands of years and is ceaselessly battered by storm and stress, a little bit of dispassion is generated in the mind. Thereupon, provided one exerts oneself a good deal, the mind becomes absorbed in samadhi. But the mind's work does not end with

absorption in samadhi; this just represents the initial stage of spiritual practice. Even after one attains it, one has to continue keeping the mind in samadhi for a very long time. Otherwise one cannot realize *kaivalya* (absolute isolation or independence).

11. *Sarvārthataikāgratayoh kṣayodayau cittasya samādhi-pariṇāmaḥ.*

Taking in all sorts of objects and concentrating on one object, these two powers [of the mind] being destroyed and manifested respectively, the mind gets the modification called samadhi.

12. *Śāntoditau tulya-pratyayau cittasyaikāgratā-pariṇāmaḥ.*

The one-pointedness of the mind is [attained] when the impression that is past and that which is present are similar. [Time stands still in the *present*, as the idea of time vanishes.]

Comment: When the aforesaid samadhi occurs, one gets the power to withdraw the mind from external things and keep it applied to one single object. After one practises like this for a long time, the mind acquires the habit of remaining steady. But, while absorbed in samadhi, if the mind is let loose now and then, considerable trouble has to be incurred in returning to that state of samadhi. This means one must cultivate the habit of remaining in samadhi without any break and through repeated practice make samadhi into an instinct or an impression (*saṁskāra*).

Once the mind gets into samadhi, its earlier habit of running in various directions goes away and it loves to remain steadily attached to a single object.

A sign of total concentration is that when the mind remains in samadhi one loses the sense of time. Even in the case of common people it is found that when the mind becomes

concentrated the sense of time diminishes. Reading a novel, one burns the midnight oil, without being conscious of the passage of time.

It is one single entity that takes different forms and appears as this universe. We are born as humans to fulfil our desire to see the One as many. That way we are unable to comprehend the truth about the universe; we can only feel its pleasurable and along with that its painfulness. The way of liberating ourselves from this pain and pleasure is to realize the unity existing in the substratum of this sense world and thereby check our hankering after enjoyment.

To illustrate the process, consider the case of a beautiful girl performing various dances before a group of spectators. After finishing her show she sits down quietly. At that time one of the spectators talks with her and comes to know that she is a close relation of

his. As soon as he comes to know this, his lustful attitude is checked. His amorous attitude towards her, which had been roused by looking at the graceful movements of her limbs, disappears.

Through the practice of yoga and attainment of samadhi, the mind becomes withdrawn from the senses and established in the Self. In that state, as a result of knowing the fundamental truths of nature, one's longing for form and flavour (*rūpa* and *rasa*) disappears and one realizes that the external world and one's apparent self (body, mind and intel-

lect) are constitutionally same. There is no distinction such as between the experiencer and the thing experienced. When one is able to know this, all impediments in the path of knowledge go away. This is the purpose of attainment of samadhi. When one acquires the power to keep the mind absorbed in samadhi, one is able to know gradually all the truths of the realm of consciousness. As a result, dispassion comes and all attractions for things that are non-Self disappear. Therefore there is only one means of attaining knowledge of the Self: the practice of concentration.

13. *Etena bhūtendriyeṣu dharma-lakṣaṇavasthā-parināmā vyākhyātāḥ.*

By this is explained the threefold transformation of form, time and state [in the mind-stuff and correspondingly] in fine or gross matter and in the organs.²

14. *Śāntoditā-vyapadeśya-dharmānupātī dharmī.*

That [substance] which is acted upon by transformations—either past, present or yet to be manifested—is the qualified.

15. *Kramānyatvām parināmānyatve hetuḥ.*

The succession of changes is the cause of manifold evolution.

16. *Parināma-traya-saṁiyamād-atitānāgata-jñānam.*

By making *saṁiyama* on the three sorts of changes [in form, time and state] comes the knowledge of past and future.

Comment: Every moment the organs and the objects of the senses undergo various changes of state. We are able to see them when they cross certain thresholds. But a yogi, with his mind absorbed in samadhi, can by his subtle power of observation perceive the directions of these delicate changes and transfor-

mations of matter and the organs. As a result, he can know the past and the future. Astrologers narrate the conditions in a man's past life and predict the possibilities of his future life by studying the signs of the zodiac and the stars. The yogis can do likewise by means of samadhi.

17. *Śabdārtha-pratyayānām-itaretarādhyāsāt-saṅkaras-tat-pravibhāga-saṁiyamāt sarva-bhūta-ruta-jñānam.*

By making *saṁiyama* on [the separateness of the external sound of a] word, [the internal vibration representing its] meaning and the knowledge [flashing up as a reaction], which are ordinarily confused [by the superimposition of one on the others], comes the knowledge of all animal sounds.

Comment: When we hear somebody's words, his organ of speech vibrates to produce a kind of waves in space. These strike against a certain spot in our ears. The mind carries that stimulus to buddhi, the intellect. The intellect

comprehends the meaning of the words with the help of earlier impressions. We are not able to observe these functions. We think that the person speaks and we hear—there is nothing more in it. Such a very complex process is in-

volved in hearing the words of somebody, yet we are not able to understand anything about it. But, with the help of his mind absorbed in samadhi, a yogi can perceive every stage of this process. Because of that, when an animal makes a sound, he can

understand the meaning of that sound, although the language remains unintelligible. We hear that Sri Ramakrishna, even in his boyhood, could follow what birds and animals said.

18. *Saṁskāra-sāksātkaraṇāt pūrva-jāti-jñānam.*

By perceiving the impressions, (comes) the knowledge of past life.

Comment: A yogi whose mind is absorbed in samadhi can clearly perceive through his subtle power of observation the *saṁskāras* (impressions) resulting from earlier

karma, which are stored in the mind-stuff. These impressions are the result of the karmas of past life. Hence perceiving these impressions, he can know everything about past life.

19. *Pratyayasya para-citta-jñānam.*

By making *samīyama* on the signs in another's body, arises knowledge of his mind.

20. *Na ca tat sālambanam tasya viṣayī-bhūtatvāt.*

But not its contents, that not being the object of the *samīyama*.

Comment: Even common people can often surmise to some extent the state of mind of a person by observing the appearance of his face and eyes. A yogi can know that fully and correctly. But the cause due to which the face

and eyes appear as they do cannot be known merely by observing the physical symptoms. To know that, the yogi has to concentrate his mind on the mind-stuff of that person.

21. *Kāya-rūpa-samīyamāt-tad-grāhya-śakti-stambhe-cakṣuḥ-prakāśāsamīyoge'ntar-dhānam.*

By making *samīyama* on the form of the body, the perceptibility of the form being obstructed and the power of manifestation [of the body] in the eye [of a beholder] being separated [from the body], the yogi's body becomes unseen. [This is because the power of perceiving forms comes from the junction of the form and the thing formed.]

22. *Etena śabdādy-antardhānam-uktam.*

By this the disappearance or concealment of words which are being spoken and such other things are also explained.

Comment: A yogi can keep his body in such a state that in spite of being right before everybody's eyes he remains invisible.

(To be continued)

Notes

1. Swami Premeshanandaji uses the word *chitta* in this very special sense.
2. The mind always undergoes modifications.

This is transformation regarding form or dharma. The mind, again, passes through the past, present and future. This is transformation regarding time, or *lakṣaṇa*. According as the impressions of control or of the re-emergence of distractions become strong or weak, we get transformation regarding state, or *avasthā*. Like the mind, matter and the organs also are subject to such threefold transformation. —Editor, *Udbodhan*.

Our faults irritate us most when we see them in others. —Dutch proverb

Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Repetition of (mantras like) *Om* as well as the *mahāvākyas* ('great sayings' asserting the identity of the individual Self with Brahman) for mental purification

चित्तशुद्ध्यर्थं प्रणवादिमहावाक्यानां आवर्तनम्

अथाध्यात्ममन्त्राज्जपेत् ॥११॥

11. Henceforth, he may repeat the *mantras* pertaining to Self[-realization].¹

The rules for initiation into *sannyāsa*

दीक्षानियमः:

दीक्षामुपेयात् । काषायवासाः । कक्षोपस्थलोमानि वर्जयेत् । ऊर्ध्वबाहुर्विमुक्तमार्गो भवति । अनिकेतश्चरेत् ।
भिक्षाशी निदिध्यासनं दध्यात् । पवित्रं धारयेऽनुसंरक्षणार्थम् ॥१२॥

12. He shall come to have initiation. [He shall wear] ochre-coloured garments. Hair [in the exposed portion of the body] should be removed. With raised hands he shall set forth [as a mendicant monk] along the path of [spiritual] Freedom and move on without any [fixed] abode. Living on alms, he shall [enter into a state of] profound meditation² [engendered by deep reflection on the Vedāntic statements of identity dealing with the oneness of the individual Self with Supreme Brahman]. He shall hold (possess) pure (absolute) Knowledge for the protection of beings.³

तदपि श्लोका भवन्ति ।

कुण्डिकां चमसं शिक्यं त्रिविष्टपमुपानहौ ।
शीतोपधातिनीं कन्थां कौपीनाच्छादनं तथा ॥१३॥
पवित्रं स्वानशार्टिं च उत्तरासङ्गमेव च ।
अतोऽतिरिक्तं यत्किञ्चित्सर्वं तद्वर्जयेद्यतिः ॥१४॥

13, 14. And [in this context] there are these [following] verses:

An ascetic [monk] shall abandon all other [worldly] things [or possessions] except⁴ these [following]: the water pot, the [alms] bowl,⁵ the sling-bag [to carry his alms, if any], the three worlds, footwear, rags⁶ for protection from cold, the loincloth to cover [his body], the purifying ring,⁷ a bath towel, and an upper cloth.⁸

(To be continued)

Notes

1. Let it be accepted that a *sannyāsin* who has renounced all ritualistic *karma* shall not indulge in any more ritualism or ceremonialism. But then, the question remains, what about a person who has taken the *sannyāsa* vows without sufficient mental purification? Does not such a person need to go through some ritualism in order to attain mental purification, which is the essential prerequisite for getting established in Knowledge (*jñāna-niṣṭhā*)? The answer is, no. A *sannyāsin* ought not to take up what he has formally renounced (on getting initiated into *sannyāsa* through the great *sannyāsa mantras*), no

matter whether he has done so knowingly or unknowingly. But then, the scriptures speak of two classes of *sannyāsa*: (1) *vidvat-sannyāsa*—renunciation by spiritual aspirants of a very high order, those who renounce the world *after* attaining Knowledge; in their case *sannyāsa* is a mere formality, meant for *loka-saṅgraha*, or universal welfare; (2) *vividīṣā-sannyāsa*—renunciation by those aspirants who have not yet attained the highest wisdom, but are deeply eager to attain the supreme Knowledge. While absolute abandonment of all ritualism and *karma-kāṇḍa* is enjoined in the case of the former class, the latter may, without giving up steadfast adherence to the highest Ideal of *sannyāsa*, repeat the *prāṇava* *mantra* (*Om*) and the *mahāvākyas* (Great Sayings), for these assert the absolute non-difference between the individual Spirit (*jīvātman*) and the supreme Spirit (*paramātman*). The *vividīṣā-sannyāsins* may, in order to attain mental purification, repeat the spiritual *mantras* like the *prāṇava*, the *mahāvākyas* or the hundred and eight Upanishads starting with the *Īśa Upaniṣad*. But in no case may they perform rituals and ceremonies with a view to attaining any of their objects of desire.

2. The word used in the text is *nididhyāsana*, the last in the series of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*. It is a state of mind that comes when deep reflection on the *mahāvākyas* of Vedānta mature into a stillness and absorption that the entire system enters into, a state of super-saturation with the awareness of Atman-Brahman identity.
3. The word *pavitram* used in the text actually means 'pure'. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin interprets it to mean *jñāna*, or Knowledge, quoting from the *śruti* text '*Pavitram jñānam ucyate*'; *pavitram* is said to be 'Knowledge.' According to him, this Knowledge is the absolute Knowledge of attributeless Brahman that a *sannyāsin* should hold on to. This would engender *sarvātma-bhāvanā*—awareness of the Atman as present in all selves; this awareness is in tune with the *śruti* statement '*Sarvān khalvidāni brahma vya-tiriktaṁ na kincid-asti*; All this is verily Brahman; there is nothing apart from It.' This gives the *sannyāsin* an awareness of cosmic identity, a profound feeling of oneness with all existence, giving rise to universal Love and Benediction. He offers protection to all beings as is said in the *mantra* '*Abhayān sarva-bhūtebhyāḥ*; [I offer] fearlessness to all beings', meaning that no being need feel any sense of fear or danger in the presence of a *sannyāsin*. As Swami Vivekananda wrote in his famous 'Song of the Sannyasin', 'Say, "Peace to all: From me no danger be/ To aught that lives./ In those that dwell on high,/ In those that lowly creep,/ I am the Self in all!"' This is the *sarvātma-bhāva*—feeling the identity of one's own Self with the Self of all.
4. An almost identical passage occurs in the *Katha Rudra Upaniṣad*, where it is mentioned that a *sannyāsin* shall abandon all the things mentioned therein; whereas here, in the *Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad*, it is stated that a *sannyāsin* shall give up all the things *except* the things mentioned. The list of things is almost identical. Thus, there appears to be a contradiction between these two statements. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin does not throw any light on this contradiction. In fact, in commenting on these passages in the *Katha Rudra Upaniṣad*, he simply states that these have been almost fully explained in the *Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad* commentary. The resolution of this apparent conflict of ideas between the two Upaniṣads seems to be that the stand regarding allowing a *sannyāsin* to retain and use a few things (as mentioned) is more of a concession to beginners who may find it impossible to abandon everything at one stroke. And at a more advanced stage, even these things could be given up, or rather these possessions drop away of themselves when the *sannyāsin*'s mind becomes more and more free from all sense of possession.
5. Bowl to collect alms (*bhiksā*) consisting of a half portion of a coconut shell.
6. The original word in Sanskrit is *kanthā*, which is an old piece of cloth composed of patches of tattered pieces put together into one piece. It is a symbol of extreme austerity and abhorrence of expensive garments.
7. As a symbol of purity, a spiritual aspirant usually wears a ring made of sacred *kuśa* grass, particularly at the time of religious observances.
8. The word used in the text is *uttarāsaṅga*. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin gives a spiritual interpretation of this word as '*vedānta-vicāra*', the capacity to be deeply drawn or attuned to Vedāntic contemplation'.

Glimpses of Holy Lives

From Death to Immortality

Kanhopatra was a beautiful daughter of a dancing girl of Mangalvedya, a holy place in Maharashtra sanctified by saints like Chokhamela and Damaji.

The Muslim king of Bidar (Vidarbha) heard of Kanhopatra's beauty and invited her to visit his court, promising her royal welcome and lavish gifts, besides offering to make her his senior concubine.

Kanhopatra was no ordinary woman. Born for God, she looked upon men as insignificant compared to her Beloved, the only object of her love. She turned to God alone for enlightenment, lasting peace and bliss. She did not respond to the king's lures.

With the sacred Ekadashi festival of Pandharpur round the corner, groups of devotees were passing through her village singing *abhangs* (devotional hymns) and playing on drums and cymbals. Deeply impressed by the group, Kanhopatra asked them where they were going. 'To the blessed feet of Lord Panduranga,' they replied. Kanhopatra asked them to describe the Lord for her. The devotees sang His praises and encouraged her to join them in their pilgrimage. 'But will the Lord accept me?' asked Kanhopatra. 'Can there be any doubt on it? He sees only the hearts of His devotees and thirsts for only pure love from them,' they assured her.

Even as a needle gets attracted to a magnet, Kanhopatra felt drawn to Pandharpur. She persuaded her mother to accompany her to the sacred abode of Panduranga.

On reaching Pandharpur, Kanhopatra fell prostrate at the Lord's feet and shed profuse tears of joy: 'Here is my solace, my goal and the end of my search.'

With Lord Panduranga as her only refuge and her all in all, she decided to settle

down in Pandharpur. 'Blessed am I to have seen Your feet' she sang rapturously, 'and I have renounced all worldly ties.' She composed and sang many beautiful *abhangs*, abounding in deep sentiments of love for God.

The news of Kanhopatra's renunciation spread to the court of the king of Bidar, where a devotee from Pandharpur sang her praises. The king remembered Kanhopatra's earlier refusal to yield to his wishes. With a strong desire to possess her resurfacing in him, he ordered his guards to fetch Kanhopatra—by force if necessary.

Learning of the impending danger, Kanhopatra trembled and went to the inner shrine of the temple, and wept inconsolably at the Lord's feet.

Meanwhile the soldiers arrived and called out to Kanhopatra, threatening to abduct her if she did not come on her own. 'Let me take leave of Pandharinath; please wait outside,' cried Kanhopatra.

'Release me, O Lord, from the evils of the world,' she cried piteously. She sang her last *abhang*: 'O Lord of the fallen, why do You torture Your devotees thus? They are but another form of Yours. Who else shall I turn to? Who is to blame if the jackal takes the share of the lion? Kanhopatra says, Release me from this body, which I offer at your feet!'

The Lord accepted her at once: her lifeless body fell at the foot of the altar. A beatific smile played on her lips, indicating the divine bliss she was submerged in during her last blessed moment. Her body was interred near the southern gate of the temple. In due course a strange tree sprang up on the spot, which is adored even to this day. Kanhopatra's devotion and her *abhangs* have made her immortal among the saints of Maharashtra. *

The Impossible Becomes Possible

Jyoti Pant made no noise about what had happened in that lonely Ganesha temple in the forest. A devotee at heart, he had never cared much for either scholarship or recognition; he valued knowledge and devotion a lot more. As a result, nobody knew that he had become a master of the Vedas.

Jyoti's maternal uncle, Mahipati, was chief secretary to the Peshwa of Pune. So Jyoti's mother thought of sending her son to Pune, where he could learn something useful. Mahipati knew Jyoti could only be a burden but it was hard for him to turn down his sister's request. Reluctantly he employed his nephew, hoping he could teach Jyoti at least some elementary bookkeeping. It was agreed that Jyoti would be paid a monthly salary of four rupees.

Just a few days had passed since Jyoti came to Pune, when the Peshwa sent for his secretary and wished to see the administration's financial records. The accounts had yet to be prepared and Mahipati pleaded for time, muttering that he was already overburdened. But the Peshwa was firm; he wanted his accounts in three days' time.

Mahipati returned to his office worried and not knowing what to do. The Peshwa had been unreasonable. There was no way he could get the statements ready in such a short time. Even at a rough estimate, the task would take not less than a month to finish—if he engaged his entire staff on the job. But who could make the Peshwa understand?

Promise Remembered

Jyoti knew he could help his uncle out; he remembered Ganesha's promise: 'Remember me if you need anything.'

'Give me the books, Uncle,' he offered. 'Let me have some stationery, a desk, a lamp, a good soft seat, one or two cushions, a glass of water and some fruit. And leave me alone for

three days; do not disturb me until I call you.'

Mahipati was in no mood for jokes. For a moment he simply gaped at his nephew. Then he exploded: 'Is that all? Idiot! Just who do you think you are, anyway? And what makes you believe I will be around to disturb you after three days? Get out of my sight!'

Then, composing himself, Mahipati saw that Jyoti was serious. The boy seemed to mean what he said and, curiously, looked confident too.

A dying man will clutch at a straw. Mahipati was in such a desperate situation as to resort to even the most unlikely means of salvation. With the resignation of a man who had nothing to lose, he decided to go along with Jyoti's proposal.

Promise Kept

Once Jyoti shut himself up in the room, he began a simple worship of Ganesha and invoked the deity's help. Sure enough, Ganesha appeared before him and set about writing up the entire year's accounts right away. The work was over on time, before the fourth morning dawned, and Ganesha disappeared. Then Jyoti called his uncle in. All Mahipati could do was stare speechlessly.

When the Peshwa called for the accounts, in strode a jubilant Mahipati, followed by his staff with armloads of ledgers. The sheer bulk of the registers that now lay spread out before him staggered the Peshwa. He had no idea of the volume of work involved when he wanted it done in three days. This was a miracle! How could an ordinary man have accomplished something like this, he wondered in silent disbelief. Then, fixing Mahipati with a look, the Peshwa said, 'Let me hear the real story.'

Jyoti recounted the whole tale with his natural humility and, turning to Mahipati, concluded: 'So it is to Ganesha that you owe your thanks, Uncle. It is all His play.' *

Holy Mother's Message of Love and Hope

Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi (12 November - 16 December 2003)

A REPORT FROM SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH, CHENNAI

The year 2003 marked the 150th birth anniversary of Holy Mother. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, observed the occasion with some memorable programmes with the following objectives.

(1) Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's life exemplified how to live peacefully with ourselves, our neighbours and with everyone, irrespective of caste, religion or nationality. Peace is what everyone is hankering after in this strife-torn world. Hence we should spread Mother's life and message to more and more people. (2) To put in place, in Mother's name, some permanent service activity in our locality or neighbourhood, especially for the welfare of helpless women and the poor. Keeping these objectives in mind, several programmes were drawn up by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, with the help of some branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, and other private centres in TamilNadu and Pondicherry.

The five important aspects of the celebrations were (i) the Tamil Nadu-Pondicherry Rathotsava, (ii) Chennai city celebrations, (iii) celebrations in the interior city and surrounding villages, (iv) permanent service schemes and (v) special publications.

Tamil Nadu-Pondicherry Rathotsava

A 4½-foot-high image of Mother surrounded by six swans was installed in a tastefully decorated truck. Escorted by a pilot van, this ratha (chariot) was driven through Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. After it went a book-sales van, an exhibition van containing photos and paintings illustrating Holy Mother's life

and message, and two more vehicles accommodating monks, volunteers and photographers. Thus, with six vehicles, 25 volunteers and some monks, Mother travelled through Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry—in just the way she used to travel in a bullock cart followed by a number of other bullock carts, during her own lifetime.

After puja, the ratha was flagged off on the morning of 12 November. The function was attended by nearly 4000 people. The ratha covered 54 prominent towns like Trichy, Thanjavur, Rameswaram, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Coimbatore and Salem. In all these places grand receptions and celebrations were held. Wayside functions were held in as many as 120 locations! These were arranged in order that people dwelling in interior places and villages could have Mother's darshan. On an average, nearly 5000 people had Mother's darshan in each town, while at the wayside functions the number was about 500. It is estimated that more than 3 lakh people participated in these functions.

At the great temples of Madurai, Rameswaram, Mannargudi, Kanyakumari, Kapaleeswar and others, Mother was received with the auspicious *purnakumbha* and other traditional temple honours. The women of these towns greeted Mother with lights. Bhajans, cultural events, street processions and public meetings were held, and prasad distributed in all places. Local newspapers reported on the events.

Special mention may be made of the proceedings at the following places: (i) *Chengam and Thiruvedagam*: In front of many houses

along the route, rangolis were drawn and Mother's picture kept on a seat and illuminated. (ii) *Ullundurpet*: In the surrounding 57 villages Mother was worshipped in photos for about a month. These pictures were then brought and decorated on the stage during the celebration. The simple village folk did not want to part with the photos of the Mother they had worshipped in their houses. They refused to lend the pictures to keep on the stage, for each one of them had a story to tell about a miracle that happened or the fortune that smiled upon them when Mother was worshipped in their houses! The villages were divided into 7



The ratha leaves the Math

zones. From each zone Mother's picture was brought in as many decorated chariots in procession. The chariots were named after the *Sapta Kanyakas* (Seven Virgins). These minor processions finally merged with the main procession to form one mammoth procession, and the whole affair ended with the feeding of 28,000 people. (iii) *Sivakasi and surrounding places*: Mother was received with birthday cakes saying 'Happy Birthday to Mother', 'Happy Birthday to Mummy' and so on. Women welcomed Mother with sprouted plants in pots following the local tradition.

Worshipping Mother, receiving her in various ways, performing arati to her—these formed the main part of the Rathotsava. However, book sales provided an opportunity for the public to get familiar with the literature on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. That the books were well received by the public is evident from the fact that the average daily sales exceeded Rs 5000. The exhibition van with 20 laminated colour photos of Mother and 25 drawings illustrating her message was another attraction. People from all walks of life showed great enthusiasm for the exhibition. In some places they waited in long queues to view it. In all places photos, pamphlets and pendants depicting Mother were distributed.

The warmth with which Mother was received is clear proof that people, whatever their caste, colour, creed or sex, are in search of solace and peace. When they found Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, welcoming one and all with her immortal words 'I am the Mother of virtuous, I am the Mother of the wicked. Whenever you are in distress, say to yourself, "I have a mother"'"—they flocked to her.

In many villages Mother was totally unknown. Yet the devotion they showed to her and the eagerness with which they received the kunkum prasad were remarkable. Some incidents are indeed unforgettable:

It was near Villupuram. A little boy, pointing out Mother to his own mother, exclaimed 'Mother, see how beautiful this Mariyamman (the local deity) is!' When one of the boys was asked who Sarada Devi was, his

spontaneous reply was 'my mother'. An old woman at Courtallam observed that Mother was returning from Kanyakumari after paying a visit to her son Swami Vivekananda.

Many were sure that Mother's visit would bring them the much-needed rains. As a matter of fact, in some places like Rajapalayam and Srivilliputtur, which had been under the grip of severe water scarcity, the rains continued for eight hours without let-up! Needless to say, the villagers attributed the rains to Mother's grace.

In Devakottai Holy Mother was received by the local Muslims in front of a mosque. In Dindigul, there was a reception at the local Christian school. The priest garlanded Mother and a public meeting was held. This is a sure sign that all religions can coexist in peace and harmony under Mother's shelter. Sri Ramakrishna was an embodiment of the harmony of religions and Mother's Rathotsava has shown the practical side of it: when Mother's message of love and hope spreads in all directions it is possible to create a world of peace and joy.

Celebrations in Chennai City

During the period of 28 days when the ratha was visiting interior Tamil Nadu, functions and public meetings were arranged at various localities in Chennai city, where eminent speakers and swamis of the Ramakrishna Order addressed the gatherings. In all, some 70 functions were conducted in Chennai. Local area committees were formed in July itself at 22 places in the city. Each committee con-

ducted at least one function. The committee from Ambattur organized 22 functions at 22 places on 22 days. Mention has to be made of the committees like those at Perambur (12 functions), Thiruvanmiyur (7), Virugambakkam (10), Koyambedu (8) and Ayanavaram, who conducted more than 5 functions. On an average, 500 people attended each function, and the highest attendance of 5000 was recorded at the final function at Koyambedu on 29 November. The *thiruvilakku* puja (worship of Mother in a lamp) at Koyambedu, in



Reception at a mosque

which 1300 women participated while thousands witnessed it, deserves special mention.

A composite puja—of one-hour duration and including short talks in English and Tamil on Mother's life and teachings, *kunkuma-arachana*, *namavali*, *dipa-aradhana* (arati) and prasad distribution—was conducted in most of the places. In slum areas the response was overwhelming. Even non-Hindus took part in the pujas enthusiastically. With the help of the pujas Mother's photos have now entered many new homes and her message has been made accessible to a large number of people who saw her for the first time. In addition to

this, the committees organized and conducted programmes like *villuppattu*, *thiruvilakku puja*, *bhajans*, *sahasranama-archana*, *annadana*, charity, processions with small rathas and palanquins, seminars, cultural competitions, book sales, multimedia shows at the venues and through local cable network operators, music concerts, dramas, dance performances and speeches by eminent persons.

Another aspect of these celebrations was Mother's visit to interior areas of Chennai city. On 12 and 15 December celebrations were conducted in localities like Raja Annamalai Puram, Teynampet and Mylapore. Indeed, it was a sight for the gods to see Mother being worshipped with 1008 lotus flowers in My-

lapore.

time that a procession of a Hindu deity had entered, Mother enjoyed a rousing welcome with each and every household sharing the joy of her arrival. Thanks to its small size, Sarada Vahini could penetrate the innermost areas of the city's slums. It also went to some suburban villages.

In some places works of a lasting nature were taken up, like organizing self-help groups for women at Kodungaiyur, installing water-supply systems at a few places in Koyambedu, sinking a tube-well for drinking water at Pattinappakkam, and starting a tailoring centre for poor women at Ambattur, to mention a few.

In all, some 30,000 books and an equal number of photos were distributed, and a huge number of invitation letters, banners, posters, stickers and other publications were used, all of which went to make the city celebrations a spectacular success. One wonders at the ways in which Holy Mother has entered and enriched so many simple lives.

Celebrations in the Surrounding Villages

Thiruvallur district, where Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, has already been successfully conducting tuition centres for indigent students in 36 places, hosted functions in 22 of its villages for 11 days between 9 November and 10 December, covering 2 villages a day. While the Rathotsava was grand and gorgeous, village functions were simpler. Installed in a small palanquin, Mother was carried on the shoulders of four boys and taken through the streets in a procession comprising students and elders of the vil-



Rural womenfolk pay respects to Mother

lapore.

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, also launched Sarada Vahini, a cute little ratha set up on a three-wheeler platform housing a small fibreglass image of Mother. This ratha visited the different function venues in Chennai city, and processions were also conducted with it in many areas. Mother was received with arati by homes on either side of the roads. Especially in the slums, where it was the first

lages. In almost every house there was a small reception, with the womenfolk performing arati to Mother. On some days there were even 350 aratis! This was generally followed by a public meeting and *annadana*, at which usually about 25,000 people were fed.

Most of these villages are continually under the grip of severe droughts due to scarcity of rainfall. It was very poignant to see the simple village folk coming to Mother with small offerings of flowers and incense sticks and pray for rains. In all the villages special prayer meetings were held at which people prayed for education, prosperity—and rains.

Even in villages where life was vitiated by communal strife, Mother's advent brought the rival groups together. Even the police were surprised, as it was the first time that there was a coming-together of all the villagers in peace and joy. In fact, some of the boys and girls who were actively involved in bhajan groups were Muslims and Christians!

Special mention needs to be made of Holy Mother's coming to the village of Perumpedu. A few days earlier 15 people had lost their lives and some more their eyesight to illicitly brewed country liquor. About 75 persons were still suffering from severe stomach ache. Mother's pictures were distributed among the victims' families and words of consolation were offered to lighten their sorrow. Poothur was yet another village affected by the same tragedy, and Mother was taken there too.

After Mother's ratha returned from the Tamil Nadu-Pondicherry tour, it was taken to many other villages on 13 and 14 December.

Permanent Service Schemes

In order that our remembrance of Holy Mother should not end with mere celebrations, but find concrete expression in useful service in her name, the following schemes have been taken up in Tamil Nadu (figures in brackets represent the number of locations where a given scheme is running): self-em-

ployment (13); Sarada Ganga drinking-water facility (10); medical service in rural areas (8); educational service in rural areas (9); book sales (4); libraries (5); tuition centres (6); boys' associations (5); old-age home (1); orphanage (1); public toilet for women (1); *Pidi Arisi Thittam* (keeping aside a handful of rice every day for distribution in times of need) (7); planting trees (3); 'Mother in Every Home' (installation of Holy Mother's picture in homes) (1); women's college (1); self-employment for women (19); and training in tailoring (1).

Special Publications

As many as 55 publications were brought out for the occasion: 20 books and many calendars, laminated photos, stickers and the like. Of the books 12 were in Tamil, 5 in English, 2 in Sanskrit and 1 in Telugu, all highly subsidized. The most important title to be released was *Photographs of Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi*, in both Tamil and English, containing all the available photos of both subjects along with explanatory notes. It is remarkable that Swami Tapasyanandaji's booklet *Sri Sarada Devi: Life and Teachings*, priced at Rs 5, sold a record 1,30,000 copies in 5 months.

The three monthly magazines, *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam* (Tamil), *Sri Ramakrishna Prabha* (Telugu) and *Vedanta Kesari* (English), all brought out special numbers on Holy Mother. *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam* sold a record number of 1,00,000 copies.

Within the period of the celebrations 3,00,000 copies of Mother's beautiful picture in a plastic pouch, 5,00,000 picture postcards, 25,000 pendants, 3,00,000 bookmarks were distributed free throughout Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. Apart from these, 10,000 copies of *Sindanai Thuligai* (Mother's sayings in Tamil) and 2000 copies of *Flashes from Sri Sarada Devi* were given away during functions held at Chennai Math. Between 9 and 16 December, a special discount of 40% was allowed on all books published by the centre, and the public bought Rs 7,00,000 worth of books during the week.

Celebrations at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai

After completing its mission of spreading Holy Mother's message across the state, the ratha returned to Chennai on 9 December. That evening Mother, who had travelled 4000 km and visited innumerable towns and villages, was accorded a splendid reception at the Math and thousands took part in the special worship, *sahasranama-archana*, *kunkuma-archana* and *pushpa-archana* held in the temple.

On the next two days, 10 and 11 December, the ratha visited the other local Ramakrishna Mission and Sarada Math centres. On the 10th an *akhanda-nama-japa-yajna* (of chanting 'om aim hrim sarva-deva-devi-svarupinyai sri sarada devyai namah') was held from 6 am to 6 pm. On the 11th a *jnana-yajna* consisting of reading from Mother's life in Tamil was con-



Kolattam before Mother

ducted, also from 6 am to 6 pm. After arati, devotees sang the Ramakrishna and Sarada *nama-sankirtanas*.

On 12 December, after Lakshmi Puja, Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, presided over a public meeting. The theme was 'Holy Mother

and Service Activities'. The coordinator of free tuition centres and rural self-employment centres described in moving words the centre's work in the villages. Nearly a thousand boys and girls who were helped by these service activities attended the meeting to express their gratitude. Yatishwari Ramakrishnapriya Amba, President, Sri Sarada Ashrama, Ulundurpet, recounted how the villagers in and around that town experienced a new joy by learning about Holy Mother's life and message. This was followed by *harikatha* on Mother's life by Gowri Rajagopal and *villupattu* by Sri Subbu Armugam. In the evening a *sahasranama-kunkuma-archana* was performed with Tamil mantras. Then, after arati, there was a music concert by Kumari Varijasri Venugopal.

On the 13th, after Sarasvati Puja, another public meeting was held, this one on 'What We Can Learn from Mother's Life'. Dr K Subramanyam, former Principal, Vivekananda College, Thiruvedagam; Dr Sarada Nambi Arooran, Head of the Department of Tamil, Queen Mary's College; and Smt Prabha Sridevan, Justice, Chennai High Court, were the speakers. Later there was a flute recital by Sri K Bhaskaran, bhajans by Sri O S Arun and a music concert by Smt Nityasree Mahadevan.

On the 14th, after Dashamahavidya Puja, Pravrajika Atmadevaprana of Sarada Math, Chennai; Smt Manjula Ramesh, Editor, *Mangayar Malar*; Smt Ilampirai Manimaran, Principal, APC Women's College, Tuticorin; and Smt Bharati Bhaskar addressed a public meeting on 'Mother's Place in Our Lives'. Then Sri

Lalgudi G J R Krishnan and Smt Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi presented a violin duet. This was followed by a delightful music recital by Smt Vani Jairam.

On the 15th, after Sarada Puja, a women's convention was held, presided over by Pra-vrajika Ramaprana, President, Sarada Math, Chennai. The subject was 'Peace, National and International: Mother's Way'. The speakers were Dr M Lakshmikumari, Director, Vedic Vision Foundation, Kodungaloor, and Kumari B Nivedita, Vice President, Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari. After a saxophone recital by Sri Kadri Gopalnath, there was a drama by students of Sri Ramakrishna Matriculation School, Ambattur, followed by devotional music by Sri R K Sriramkumar. Smt S Janaki presented a music concert after evening arati.

On almost all these days there were *saha-sravana-kunkuma-archanas* and on two days *pushpa-archanas* with lotus flowers. These attracted enormous crowds. Attendance at all the musical events was so huge that even two large halls were filled to overflowing and mega screens had to be installed for those standing outside.

A photo exhibition was open throughout the week at the old temple prayer hall, where about 700 photos highlighting the various aspects of these celebrations were displayed in an artistic manner. About 10,000 people are estimated to have viewed this exhibition.

Sri Sarada Devi Jayanti, which fell on the 16th, was held with great pomp. Reports were presented by the monks in charge of the celebrations' aforementioned five main departments. Pandals were erected at the PS High

School ground opposite the Math where over 10,000 devotees partook of cooked prasad.

* * *

Chennai Ramakrishna Math's celebration of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary is really and truly a glorious, historic event that has brought love, hope, peace and joy to all who were fortunate enough to take part in its various functions. The experience has left such an impress on their minds that they can at any moment recall and relive the blessed occasion. Unaffected by the magnitude of their achievement, though, they remember that it is only Holy Mother's grace that has accomplished everything for them through the unstinting help and cooperation of charitable individuals and institutions and, of course, the selfless labour of love extended by her innumerable 'devotee children'.

Now comes the question 'What has been the result of this colossal event?' The answer is twofold: For those who accompanied the ratha and for those who organized the programmes, the conviction has taken root that Mother is a living force directing all events *personally*, that there is a definite place for everybody under her benign roof of love. Every one of them has some story or other to narrate about how Mother's grace worked all the time to accomplish things for them. The other outcome is that Mother has entered the lives of thousands of people who were unaware of her until now. A life into which she, the embodiment of love, hope and holiness, enters is sure to inherit her qualities. Men and women so blessed are sure to build good homes and a great nation. That is no small achievement. *

Awoman complained to a visiting friend that her neighbour was a poor housekeeper. 'You should see how dirty her children are—and her house. It is almost a disgrace to be living in the same neighbourhood as hers. Take a look at those clothes she has hung out on the line. See the black streaks on the sheets and towels.' The friend walked up to the window and said, 'I think the clothes are quite clean, my dear. The streaks are on your window.'

—Anthony de Mello, The Prayer of the Frog



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Shirdi Sai Baba and Other Perfect Masters. C B Satpathy. Sterling Publishers, A-59 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020. 2001. E-mail: ghai@nde.vsnl.net.in. vi + 143 pp. Rs 135.

Shirdi Sai Baba has been the spiritual core for the growth of faith and patience in many millions of people all over India, and this trend has now spread to many parts of the world. This extant spiritual tradition has found many explicators and interpreters both in India and abroad all of whom speak about the transformation that has come about in their inner being after their introduction to Sai Baba. The author of the present volume is one among them. As the 'Editor's Note' puts it, Sri Satpathy 'is divinity embodied. ... Sai is the thread that weaves through every facet of his existence. ... His humility is amply reflected in the fact that he calls himself the servant of Sai. ... His life is an inspiration, a lesson in sacrifice, healing and faith.'

The volume is a collection of the author's speeches and writings between 1991 and 1995. It is divided into eight chapters of which the first one is an introduction entitled 'Some Revelations on the Sadgurus'. The second chapter details Sri Sai Baba as an incarnation, how Baba looked, how he came into the life of the author, the divine mystery of the life of Sai Baba, his assurance to uplift the devotees, and the world of Sai Baba—past, present and future. The remaining chapters are devoted to putting Sai Baba on the same canvas as some other renowned spiritual preceptors such as Hazrat Babajan, Sarmad, Sri Akkalkot Maharaj, Sri Gajanan Maharaj, Hazrat Baba Tazuddin and Sri Upasani Maharaj.

The volume begins with a touching verse tribute to Sai Baba entitled 'My Master', which amply expresses the author's spiritual conviction and his experience of the presence of Sai Baba within him at all times:

Child,
I am your Master,

I am in you,
You came from me, you came for me,
That is your destiny awake and see.

Such genuine transparency in matters spiritual is always powerfully moving, and those who read the volume will feel the elevating power of the author's thought and experience. The simplicity and spontaneity of his expression is an added advantage.

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Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong. Roger T Ames and David L Hall. University of Hawaii Press, 2840 Kolo-walu Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822-1888. 2001. xiii +168 pp. \$ 18.

The discipline of comparative religion and philosophy has an insatiable thirst for classical texts in translation. Necessarily, these translations leave much to be desired. Chinese philosophical treatises composed thousands of years ago are sacred spaces where even angels must fear to tread. But Roger Ames and David Hall have not come to the job impelled by folly. *Focusing the Familiar* is not unlike the *gu* ritual vessel of the Shang dynasty on the cover. The text in Chinese characters, a literal translation, a detailed introduction and some helpful appendices have been placed in the volume as in a crucible to be ingested by the sincere reader. Surely, apart from scholars interested in the volume for their academic comparatism, the volume can also help the seeker since *Zhongyong* was meant to be a guide to reach the pathless land of Truth.

Prior to third century BC Confucianism was more or less a system of ethical precepts, not unlike the moral universe one finds in the ancient Tamil treatise *Tirukkural*. The Confucian emphasis on *jen* is comparable to the term *oppuravu* in the Tamil work. Theology entered Confucianism in a big way

two thousand years ago. Today, the system is found codified in *Lun Yu* (The Analects of Confucius), *Tu Hsueh* (Great Learning), *Chung Yung* (Doctrine of the Mean) and the *Book of Mencius*.

Chung Yung (*Zhongyong*) links the divine and the human in a creative whole and helps us observe life around us, which we have only been seeing till now. Observation makes the mind a keen instrument, and *Zhongyong* is a treatise that draws our close attention to the historical and cultural tradition of Confucianism and the various scriptural texts of the canon. Reduced to essentials, the philosophy of the text teaches us that no man is an island. Man should learn to live in harmony (*he*), and it is interesting to learn about the etymology of this vital term:

'Harmony is the art of combining and blending two or more foodstuffs so that they mutually enhance one another without losing their distinctive flavors. Throughout the early corpus, the preparation of food is appealed to as a gloss on this sense of elegant harmony. Harmony so considered entails both the integrity of the particular ingredient and its ease of integration into some larger whole.' (65-6)

This culinary association carries an important lesson to our academics today who seek to grow as far apart as they can from everyday life, thus making philosophy an alien, inscrutable discipline for the common man. But our ancients knew better, and we know how the highest truths were imparted to the hearer in recent times by Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who tuned spiritual truths to familiar categories (the fisherman who tried to steal fish from a private lake, the grain-dealer who kept a tray of puffed rice near his rice store) and thus effortlessly raised the consciousness of every man.

Even if we keep ourselves close only to the text, *Zhongyong* affords a very interesting read, especially because of the crystalline English version. The scripture tells us that it is only petty persons who seek to sow disharmony in creation. The tragedy seems to be that the realized soul keeps apart from everyday life, while the unworthy can never hope to be part of harmonious living. What is the use of a person proclaiming himself to be wise when he cannot go through the elementary task of living harmoniously with the familiar affairs of the day (*Zhongyong*)? Thus the ninth statement:

'Even the world, its states, and its clans can be pacified, even ranks and emoluments can be de-

clined, and even flashing blades can be trodden underfoot, but focusing the familiar affairs of the day (*Zhongyong*)—this is no easy matter.' (91)

The teacher of *Zhongyong* frowns at indecisive people who give up their aspirations halfway through and those who prefer occult practices. He is a true sage (*shengzhe*) who has learnt to live in harmony with creation and is not the least bothered by having to live in obscurity. Remember, this way is practised well in 'the simple lives of ordinary men and women': 'The proper way (*dao*) is not at all remote from people. If someone takes as the way that which distances them from others, it should not be considered the proper way.' (94)

In effect, we could call *Zhongyong* a scripture of humanism. The best in royalty is also presented in the work. King Wu, Duke of Zhou and others are seen treading the path of duty with anxious care. Guidelines of administration found here offer help to many a student of business administration. Bringing out the best in oneself by constant endeavour (*cheng*) is sadhana: 'Creating is the proper way of becoming human.' Such persons who engage themselves in *cheng* are able to achieve excellence and transform fellow men. Like the fish which has dived to the bottom yet remains visible above the waters, 'exemplary persons are respected without lifting a hand, and are credible without having spoken a word'.

The translators have done a highly satisfactory job in this edition of *Zhongyong* which has been produced with much love and care. A welcome addition to our shelf of Chinese philosophy.

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Vedic Health Care System. *Rama Lal Sah, Binod Kumar Joshi and Geeta Joshi*. New Age Books, A-44 Narina Phase 1, New Delhi 110 028. E-mail: info@newagebooksindia.com. 2002. 170 + xii pp. Rs 225.

Today, the field of medical science is going through a great change. Many illnesses like cancer and AIDS are baffling medical experts. They find themselves looking for other channels of health care. In the USA, the amount of money being spent on complementary systems is increasing with every year. Ayurveda is one of the systems of interest, and Ayurveda physicians can now be found in ev-

ery big town.

This book opens a vision of the human system through the perception of great Indian masters.

The Upanishads speak of two thousand *nadis* in our body. These *nadis* carry the essential energy (prana, if you will) that is responsible for our being alive, active and functioning. Any obstacle in these *nadis* is sure to create illness.

Ayurveda's contribution in analysing health or sickness through *nadi pariksha* is unique. How *vaidyas* could ascertain a person's state of health just by using this procedure may never be explained scientifically.

The authors have clearly presented *dhamani*, *sira* and *marma*. They have used illustrations to explain what each one represents and how to apply them in identifying and rectifying problems of the body. They have respected the great Sanskrit work

of Shushruta, a classical Ayurveda text. To translate this work into English and present it clearly is not easy, but the authors have put a huge effort into communicating it as clearly as possible.

The chapter on 'Examples of Common Diseases Treated by *Siravedhana* and *Agnikarma*' is a treat for any student of Ayurveda.

Reading this book one wonders whether acupuncture was inspired by ancient Sanskrit texts and whether acupuncture and Ayurveda come from the same source.

Most important, this book offers hope to the medical community. It is hoped that it will reach seekers in the field of health care all over the world.

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Chennai



Sister Gargi Passes Away



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Sister Gargi (Marie Louise Burke), a leading literary figure in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta movement and a member of the convent of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, passed away peacefully in her apartment at the convent on 20 January 2004. She was 91.

Burke met Swami Ashokananda in 1948 when he was in charge of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in San Francisco, and soon became his disciple. It was he who encouraged her to write about Swami Vivekananda. She rightfully gained recognition as the distinguished author of the six-volume classic *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, which has become an indispensable source book in India and in Vedanta circles worldwide.

She became a regular pilgrim to India from 1973, where she lived and worked at the guest house of the Ramakrishna Mission headquarters at Belur Math. During her visit to India in 1974 she took her first monastic vows in Belur Math and was given the name Sister Gargi, after the renowned scholar of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. In 1983, in recognition of her brilliant work as a researcher and writer, she received the first Vivekananda Award from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture.

Sister Gargi has left a rich legacy for the Vedanta movement and for all those interested in the practice of Vedanta. Her immense contribution to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, her dedication and lifelong labour will remain a source of inspiration to generations of Vivekananda readers.

Sister Gargi's recent books include *Swami Trigunatita: His Life and Work* (1997), *A Heart Poured Out: A Story of Swami Ashokananda* (2003) and *A Disciple's Journal: In the Company of Swami Ashokananda* (2003).

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Reports

Opened. A new vocational training centre building; at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol; on 30 November 2003.

Inaugurated. 'Raina Basera', a rest house for attendants and relatives of poor patients; by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow; on 2 December 2003.

Observed. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary; by Matri Mandir, Jayrambati; from 16 to 22 December 2003. Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, declared open the exhibition 'Sarada Mela' and released a souvenir brought out on the occasion. He also gave a benedictory address at the public meeting presided over by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on the inaugural day. The week-long programme included *akhanda japa* from sunrise to sunset, a Durga Saptashati Homa, women's and girls' conventions, cultural programmes and a procession in which 25,000 devotees took part. On 24 December 4000 poor villagers were specially invited and fed sumptuously.

Across the country, branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission celebrated the occasion in a grand and useful manner, focusing on women's welfare. It is beyond the scope of this column to describe the diversity and immensity of the public works undertaken.

Held. The 94th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission; at Belur Math; on 21 December 2003. The meeting was chaired by Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maha-

raj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Laid. Foundation stone for 'Sarada Sabha Bhavan', an assembly hall; by Swami Smarananandaji; at the matriculation school run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai; on 25 December 2003.

Opened. A new eye ward; at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban; on 25 December 2003.

Started. A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math; at Cooch Behar; in December 2003; with land and buildings received from Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Cooch Behar. The name and address of the centre is: *Ramakrishna Math*, New Town, Cooch Behar, West Bengal 736 101 (Phone: 03582-233859). Swami Ajaranandaji has been appointed head of the centre.

Renamed. Vivekananda Ashrama, Ulsoor; as *Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor*; in December 2003.

Secured. 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th and 9th ranks in last year's state-level examinations; by students of the higher secondary school run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur.

Awarded. A 5-year 'A' rating; to the degree college run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur; by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, an autonomous institution of the University Grants Commission.

Conferred. 'The Best School Award'; on Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar; by the National Science Olympiad Foundation,

New Delhi.

Distributed. 4900 kg rice, 590kg dal, 1057 kg potatoes, 540 kg salt, 211 kg biscuits and 30 kg milk powder; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda; among 4114 people affected by violence at three tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district; in December 2003. Besides, medical treatment was given to 743

people.

Distributed. 10,000 blankets and 40,000 assorted garments; among poor people faced with a severe winter; by various branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission; in different parts of the country; during December 2003. *

Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission

The 94th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on 21 December 2003. Here is a synopsis of the Governing Body's report issued by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Among the important developments during 2002-03, the following deserve special mention: the starting of a new centre in Chittagong, Bangladesh; the inauguration of a maternity block and a dental unit at Vrindaban Sevashrama; an intensive care unit at Kankhal Sevashrama; a paediatric wing at Lucknow Polyclinic; and a mobile medical unit at Jammu. A 78-flat housing complex was constructed at Bagmari, Kolkata, and handed over to the slum-dwellers living in the hospital campus by Seva Pratishtan.

Under the Ramakrishna Math, inauguration of a polyclinic at Pune and the merger of Balaram Mandir Trust, Kolkata, and Swami Brahmananda Trust, Sikra Kulingram, with the Ramakrishna Math, deserve special mention.

During the year the Mission undertook extensive relief and rehabilitation programmes in several parts of the country, involving an expenditure of Rs 7.81 crore and benefiting nearly 3.98 lakh people of some 1745 villages. The massive rehabilitation work started in Gujarat was completed in March 2003. The project comprised, among other things, the following: (i) construction of 390 houses, 81 school buildings and 5 community halls; (ii) providing building materials to 190 families under the 'Build Your Own House' scheme; and (iii) digging of 7 tanks and water reservoirs. The total cost of the Gujarat Earthquake Relief and Rehabilitation Project was around Rs 20 crore.

Welfare work by way of scholarships for poor students and pecuniary help to old, sick and destitute people amounted to Rs 2.67 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 62 lakh people through 9 hospitals and 111 dispensaries, including mobile units. The expenditure incurred was Rs 31.36 crore.

Nearly 1.80 lakh students, including 66,000 girls, were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to postgraduate levels. A sum of Rs 80.36 crore was spent on educational work.

A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs 9.87 crore. *